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GRACE LEE.

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GRACE LEE.

A Tale.

BY

JULIA KAVANAGH,

AUTHOR OF "NATHALIE;" "WOMEN OF CHRISTIANITY;" ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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GRACE LEE.

CHAPTER I.

“AND so, Mr. Owen,” said Lily, when he called the next day, “you are sending me away in order to have Grace all to yourself. Oh ! you may look ; she is not here. However here is her image to charm your constant eyes ;” and she placed before him a small but exquisite miniature of Grace.

He took it in the hollow of his hand, and sitting back looked at it long and earnestly. Many would have called it a flattered likeness, for it showed Grace as she only looked sometimes, when her whole aspect seemed lit up with an

inward flame; but thus he had seen her, and he knew that it was a true image of her he loved.

“What a connoisseur,” mockingly said Lily; “well that is not all, push that spring, look at the back,—well, what do you see?”

“A lock of her hair, true enough. Is this treasure yours?”

“Of course it is.”

“Well, then, I borrow it,” and he put it in his pocket.

In vain Lily got angry, and remonstrated. Mr. Owen still averring that he only borrowed it, kept the portrait, and being obliged to leave without waiting for the return of Miss Lee, he took it away with him.

Mr. Owen rarely spent a day without seeing Grace; that same evening, at a late hour, just when she was leaving the parlour to join Lily up stairs, he came again.

“Has anything happened?” asked Grace, as he entered.

“Nothing. I know it is late; I am only come for a minute or so.”

“To say what!”

“Truly, to say nothing, but to look at you; see you, and go away again.”

Grace did not seem to heed this speech.

“Yes, I was out when you came to-day,” she said; “do you know that I have turned artist,—I have been painting Lily, look!” and she showed him a small miniature of Mrs. Gerald and her child. “What do you think of them? Am I likely to make money by this new branch of art?”

“I hope not,” he replied, hastily. “Do you want to ruin your sight, and your health? Oh! Grace, Grace, you will make me lose all patience.”

“By the way,” continued Miss Lee, “you must give me back the miniature you took to-day.”

“I borrowed it from Mrs. Gerald.”

"Excuse me; you could not borrow it from her, for the simple reason that it is not hers."

"It is yours. Give it to me, Grace, give it to me;" and in his earnestness he took both her hands in his, and looked eagerly in her face. "Give it to me," he said again, "do, Grace, do, I entreat you;" and his looks were even more beseeching than his words.

Miss Lee looked at him hesitatingly.

"I cannot," she said, at length, "it is Doctor Crankey's; it belonged to his cousin, and has remained in my care: but it is not mine to give or lend."

"Take it, then," he said, putting it in her hand, and turning away much hurt, "I see you grudge me even that poor image."

Her hand laid on his arm arrested him.

"I do not grudge it you," she said, earnestly, "and since you care so much for the image of one you see daily, why you shall have it some day, Mr. Owen."

“Will you, will you, really?” he exclaimed, delighted. “When then?”

“Not to-morrow, certainly; nor yet next week; nor may be next month; but some time or other as true as my name is Grace Lee, you surely shall have it. And now I hear the church-bell striking eleven. Good-night; God bless you!”

Her hand lingered in his, her eyes dwelt on his face longer than usual. Unusual kindness was in her voice, and in her whole aspect. “Ah!” he thought, as he left her, “let but that little deceiver and her child be gone, and Grace is surely mine.”

Miss Lee went up to the room which she shared with Lily and little Grace. The child slept in its crib; Lily stood looking out of the window.

“Do come here,” she whispered.

Grace obeyed, but as quickly drew back. She had seen Mr. Owen, who was slowly walking up and down the road opposite the house.

“Does he often promenade so?” asked Lily, softly closing the window.

“Yes, sometimes; when he comes late, as to night, and he cannot see us.” She spoke carelessly.

“And he cannot see us!” echoed Lily. “Oh! Grace, how can you speak so; pray whose portrait did he take away to-day?”

“He has just given it back to me,” replied Grace; and she laid it on the table.

“You had the heart to ask it from him, and the power too to make him give it up—I wonder if he is still there!”

She gently raised the curtain, looked, and said he was gone; but Grace shook her head and denied it.

“I say he is gone,” insisted Lily, “and how can you tell he is not?”

“I have not heard his step going—there! he is going now!” she exclaimed, with a start, “listen, Lily, listen, the night is so still you can hear it quite plainly.”

But Lily's ear was dull; she heard nothing; besides, to say the truth, she felt more interested in looking at Grace; unconscious of observation she stood with her head turned and her ear bent, listening intently.

"Truly," said Lily, "you have subdued that proud heart; well 'tis no wonder—you do not care about him."

She sat on the edge of the bed; opposite her stood Grace, now slowly undoing her long hair. On the table between both burned the lamp; its light fell on Miss Lee's face. As Lily spoke, it glowed of a clear crimson red; her eyes lit like flame; a thrill shot through her very heart,—she clasped her hands.

"I do not care for him!" she echoed in passionate accents—"I do not care for him!—and more or less I have loved him my whole life."

Lily, too, was undoing her fair tresses. She paused, mute and confounded at what she heard

and saw ; for Grace spoke as never before had she spoken, and looked as Lily had never seen her look until that hour. When at length Mrs. Gerald recovered, it was to assail Grace with caresses and questions. She made her sit down on the bed by her, she twined her arms around her neck, and amidst all her endearments she beseechingly said : “ Do tell me all about it, Grace. Do tell me.”

But Grace only laughed.

“ How can you laugh ” reproachfully asked Lily, “ when we are to part to-morrow ? ”

“ That is just it. If we are to weep and be sad to-morrow, let us laugh and be merry to-night.”

“ And tell me all to-night ; do, darling, do. I shall be wretched if you do not—I am dying to know. I cannot understand it at all—how can you have known Mr. Owen so long ? ”

“ How ! ” replied Grace, smiling down into Lily’s upraised face ; “ why, very easily, child ;

were we not born in the same country and county? in the same town and parish? I remember him a boy—myself a child—”

“And you were in love with him then, Grace?”

“In love!” echoed Grace, laughing; “well, perhaps I was. I liked to see him, and it mortified me that he never looked at me. As a child may like, I liked him.”

“And later, when he came to your father—Mr. Lee’s house—did you like him then, Grace?”

“Yes, I had a girl’s fancy for his step and his look.”

“Did you think of him when you left Wales?”

“A little, and when I met him after years, I knew him at once—I liked him again; I liked him as we like the eagle for its boldness and its pride, the torrent for its fearless course—as we like things great and free.”

“And no more!” ejaculated Lily.

“No more,” quietly answered Grace.

“Grace, that was not much.”

“It was more than he wanted—more than I ever gave another.”

But Lily was not satisfied.

“You said you had loved him your whole life, Grace.”

“Ay, Lily, more or less I confess I liked him. His very pride attracted me irresistibly. I did not want to humble, but to subdue it. I failed ; yet I liked him. He was my countryman, too, the blood of the same people flowed in our veins ; in his features I traced the features of our race ; on his tongue my ear caught many a touch of the Welsh speech. I would have served him if I could. I would have helped him to rise above the vulgar crowd he was born to rule. But still I kept to liking. There may be women who can give their whole heart to one who neither seeks nor cares for the gift, but I am not of them. I preferred him to every other, yet I could live without him ; his presence was pleasant to me,

yet I could be happy though he was not by. The heart, too, Lily, has its fruit that will not ripen without sun."

"And now," said Lily, archly, "the sun has come, and the fruit hangs ripe on the tree. Eh! Grace?"

Grace did not reply, but she smiled. There was a red glow on her cheek; there was a clear light in her eyes, and in her whole aspect something both radiant and triumphant. She looked like one who has prevailed, and who rejoices in the knowledge. Lily looked at her for a while; then suddenly she said:

"Grace, why do you not let Mr. Owen know that you are fond of him?"

"Let him know it!" exclaimed Grace, seeming terrified at the mere idea. "Ah, Lily, when I do that we are both undone. He is so blinded by his passion that if he knew I liked him to-day, he would want me to marry him to-morrow."

“And you could not put him off till next week?” asked Lily, laughing.

Grace looked at her earnestly.

“You loved Gerald,” she began—

“No,” frankly interrupted Lily; “I was attached to my husband, of course, but not a bit in love with him—that sort of thing never was, and never shall be, in my way, Grace.”

“Then you know not, Lily, that Love is strong as death and weak as a child. If Mr. Owen once knew the truth, I could deny him nothing. To give him a passing second’s pleasure I would do all save sin; to make him happy I would forget everything in this wide world save God.”

She bowed her flushed face as in a faltering voice she uttered this confession. Lily looked at her silent and wondering.

“By the way, Grace,” she resumed, “you have not told me how you came to pass from liking to love!”

“It is a long story,” slowly replied Grace. “I did not mean it: but he loved me so much, and he proved it so deeply—he loved me so much and I had always liked him—and then one cannot breathe an air all flame and remain of ice, and so I ended by loving him. He has never known it. When I loved more he thought I loved less, and I did not dare to undeceive him—knowing my own weakness I shunned him—he sought and found me. I retrenched myself within my last defence—seeming coldness—but Heaven alone knows how hard the task has been, and is still.”

“Why not marry him, Grace?”

Grace raised her head and smiled.

“Why not marry him? Because I love him, Lily! Marry him! poor fellow! that is just what he wants!—but dear would the wish cost him! His position is false from beginning to end—he is not rich, he is not poor—he is not obscure, he is not famous—he is in debt, too!

Add to this a wife and establishment, and John Owen is a ruined man. Poor fellow! Ah!" she added with a sigh, "if his wife could, like Grace Lee, earn her daily bread, support herself and be no burden, or if he were still the unknown surgeon whose wild home rose on the rock below the mountain, above the torrent, I would tell him to-night—'I will be your wife tomorrow.' But it cannot be—it cannot be—he must be patient, and I must be wise, and we both must wait."

"Then, if he had plenty of money all would be right," said Lily.

"Alas! no," sighed Grace; "you forget, Lily, what he too forgets, that I am a disgraced woman. Let me but appear in the world as his wife, and how soon will every tale of slander and shame be revived. He is too proud, too overbearing, not to have enemies. What a hold for them! How easy to sting him in his love and in his pride, and in a way, too, which both love and pride would forbid him to resent. For

this money has no cure. He must stand high and beyond the reach of mean enemies ; he must be strong and dreaded. He must be so secure that none shall even dare to breathe the name of his wife too high. For his sake, I know he would not care, but for mine he might, and it would make him suffer. And then I, too, am proud, Lily, and I would not be a subject of reproach or shame to my husband."

"And when and how is all this to end?" asked Lily.

"Heaven knows!"

"Very oracular ; but not at all to the purpose. I wonder you are not afraid, Grace."

"Of what?" asked Grace, smoothing her sister's fair hair.

"That Mr. Owen should weary of all this, and feeling rather too much convinced of your indifference—should in his turn become indifferent."

Grace smiled—a smile full of faith and triumph.

“Weary!” she echoed; “he cannot. Can his heart weary of beating in his bosom? As long as I like, I may try his patience and humble his pride; do what I will—act as I like—he still must love me! It is not,” she added, with proud humility, “that I am young or handsome, or in any way attractive—the charm is in his eyes, and not in what his eyes behold—in his heart, and not in what that heart holds so dear. I cannot help loving him, spite the thousand faults I see in him—how then can he help loving me?”

“Hem!” said Lily. “I would not trust to that if I were you, Grace. Besides, you know, he might find some one else.”

Grace interrupted her with a gay laugh.

“And who else would dare to have him?” she asked. “Lily, the story of Semele is no fable. She perished in the fires of her god-lover; and though John Owen is no god, nothing but a proud and passionate mortal, yet he would blight

any woman's youth and beauty in a week. Woe be to her who dares to have him."

Lily opened her blue eyes and looked curious; but she soon returned to her old argument.

"For all that, Grace," she said, "I would, if I were you, risk nothing."

"And I risk nothing, you little sceptic," replied Grace, again smiling. "Besides," she added, her colour rising and her eyes sparkling, "I would risk all, ay, ten times over, rather than not see him as he ought to be; the first. God gave him strength to prevail, power to rule, mind to master men—and shall the love of a woman keep him down in obscurity? Never, Lily, never with the will of Grace Lee. I was ambitious for him before he loved me—think, then, if I am ambitious for him now. Dear to me as my blood and my life, dearer by far are his ardent love and fondness; yet could they be mine, but at the cost of his success in life, I would bid them both perish and die this moment.

Ay, let him forget Grace—Grace whom he now loves so dearly—let him forget her as the man forgets the boy's young love—but let him still be first."

She laid her hand on Lily's arm and looked down at her as she spoke. Her long, loosened hair, fell on her bare shoulders and rolled down below her waist; her face was warm and burning; tears shone in her dark eyes; her parted lips smiled with mingled triumph and sweetness; her whole aspect had that something beyond beauty, because beyond time, which, if it were not, alas! so fleeting, the thing of a moment no sooner felt than gone, would charm and move the heart almost too deeply.

"Grace," said Lily, looking up in her face with unusual seriousness, "you are a noble creature; but for the world I would not be like you."

"Why so?"

"You never will be happy."

Grace laughed at the prediction ; but suddenly Lily began to weep ; she remembered that she was to leave her sister on the morrow, to see her no more, and she shed tears light as her heart and as her grief. At length Grace hushed her sorrow, and persuaded her to try and sleep.

Lily yielded ; but she clasped and kept within hers the hand of Grace ; her fair head sank on the pillow ; her blue eyes closed ; through her rosy lips her breath came regular and soft. Still, sitting on the edge of the bed, Grace looked down at her fondly. Look long at that fair face, now calmly beautiful as that of a child, look long, Grace Lee, for though years may pass over both, never shall you two, once parted, meet again on earth !

CHAPTER II.

AT the hour appointed, Mr. Owen called with the carriage that was to take away Mrs. Gerald Lee and her child. Lily cried : Grace laughed and jested. Life was long she said ; they would surely meet again : but, first under one pretence, and then under another, she delayed their departure until Mr. Owen said he could wait no more. Then Lily threw herself weeping into her sister's arms, and Grace pressing her to her bosom, bent over her mute and pale. Mr. Owen saw that she suffered ; he would delay no longer ; scarcely had she released Lily, scarcely bestowed a last caress on little Grace, when he hurried both away : again Miss Lee was left to solitude.

Lily flung herself into the carriage, burst into tears, and called Miss Blount a hard-hearted wretch.

Mr. Owen neither heard nor answered her ; he longed to be back with his solitary and forsaken Grace.

“Mr. Owen,” suddenly exclaimed Lily, looking up ; “if ever you forget or forsake Grace, I shall hate you.”

“And pray, Mrs. Gerald, what made you dream of such a thing?” composedly observed Owen, raising his eyes, which he fastened keenly on the lady’s face.

“What ! what ? nothing, save that she is a great deal too good for you, or for any one.”

“What has she been saying to you last night?” he asked, with an intuitive perception of the truth that alarmed her, for this time she would not have dared to betray Grace.

“Nothing,” she hastily replied.

Mr. Owen did not insist ; but he was not

convinced. They had by this reached the town, and were driving fast through crowded streets, to Miss Blount's abode. The carriage stopped; they alighted, and went up the staircase of the dull London house. Lily laughed as she read Mr. Owen's name on the first floor, and turning round, she hoped he would have the charity to visit her now and then. "You see," she added, half-yawning; "I expect to be dreadfully dull, and if you do not come, I shall just die of the spleen. I wonder Miss Blount does not live in a house of her own; she is rich enough, surely? Oh! you must go in before us, Mr. Owen; and face the dragon first, if you please."

They found the dragon sitting in her chair, stiff and grim:

"Well, Mrs. Gerald Lee," she said, as Lily advanced towards her, and she looked ungracious enough; "you have managed to get married, and have a child, and become a widow, since we parted."

“I have had that happiness, and that misfortune,” replied Lily very gravely; “Grace, my dear, give Miss Blount your hand.”

Heaven knows how often little Grace had been told and taught to behave herself well with the old lady, but instead of being a good child, and making herself agreeable to her wealthy cousin, little Grace screamed, behaved very badly, and to crown her offences, refused to go near Miss Blount, whom she distinctly called a dragon.

Lily was annoyed and disconcerted; Miss Blount smiled grimly, and dropped unpleasant hints about the sincerity of children, then quietly turning to Mr. Owen, who looked on rather amused at all this, she began a conversation with him, whilst Lily by scolding, pinching, and caressing, reduced Grace to silence. When half an hour had thus passed, Mr. Owen rose to go; Miss Blount sat at one end of the room; at the other, Lily stood looking out of the window into the street.

"Tell *her* I am wretched," she said, in a low tone.

"What did she say to you last night?" he asked in the same key; and he gave her a glance so penetrating and so keen that Mrs. Gerald Lee was disconcerted.

"Nothing, nothing at all," she replied, reddening.

"Ah! if I were but alone with her," he thought, glancing towards Miss Blount; but it could not be, and gnawing his lip with ill-repressed impatience he left them.

Mr. Owen's mind was subtle and keen, and it was now bent on a matter that interested him deeply. He guessed much; Grace, on the night before parting, had been more confidential.

"And so," he thought, "she could tell that little Lily what I am not to know. Foolish girl! does she think she can for ever baffle me!" And he sat down, revolving strange plans, in which love and resentment blended.

Miss Lee knew her lover well. Where his passion was concerned, she could not trust his forbearance or his generosity. Mr. Owen was not a good man; there was something great and generous about him, but there was not goodness. His love, though true, was as selfish as hers was devoted. It was a man's passion, that will be gratified no matter what the cost may be. He loved her too deeply to dream of wronging her; his nature was above it; but he could be subtle and designing, even with the woman he loved. And now, as we have said, he sat revolving strange plans, of which more hereafter. Two letters, brought by the same post, interrupted his reflections. One was from Mr. Hanley, and contained the usual brief invitation to dinner; the other from his old friend, Doctor Marsh, was as follows:

“MY DEAR OWEN,—

“Even in our quiet place, Ultima Thule, as the Roman hath it, the fame of our gifted fellow-

townsman has reached us. Truly and verily have we rejoiced over you, John Owen. W——, that nursed your youth, that cherished you in her bosom like a tender mother, is justly proud of her son; and no reasonable person can doubt that, in later ages, it will be recorded, as one of her glories, that she was your birth-place. In the meanwhile, my friend and former pupil, it behoves you to remember the land that gave you birth; remember, too, that the blessing promised to the dutiful child belongs, by equal right, to the patriot.

“But, maybe, you will ask, ‘whereunto doth this exordium lead?’ to matter of deep import. It cannot have escaped your memory that, even when you left W——, the patriotic zeal of our townsman, Mr. Morris, then Lord Mayor, had caused to be begun that canal which shall bear to us the waters of our most classical river; and, I will venture to add, shall also carry down his name to the broad sea of time. And now, my

friend, Fate threatens to interrupt this great and useful labour, through causes which I shall relate at full length."

"At full length," thought Owen, his patience failing him; "and what have I to do with the canal, and Mr. Morris, the patriotic Lord Mayor, and all this trash?" Nevertheless he resumed his reading.

"Heaven knows how truly and sincerely I am attached to the national institutions of our country; our aristocracy I consider the bulwark of our glorious and immortal Constitution; yet, my friend, I belong, by birth, education, and feeling, to the middle class; and so do you, John Owen, and it behoves us both to remember this important fact."

"Very important, truly," scornfully thought Owen.

"Of course, my friend, you know that at the present moment there is beginning for the borough of W——, a sharp contest between Lord

W—— on one side, and our enlightened Morris, the patriotic Lord Mayor, on the other. The electors of W—— respect Lord W—— as an honourable and amiable young nobleman, but they do not think him capable of representing them in the legislative assembly of their country. They cannot forget that he has been heard to speak of W—— as ‘that nutshell;’ and that, riding past the above-mentioned canal, he scornfully exclaimed, ‘who ever saw such a puddle?’ a remark heard by his valet, who repeated it to the chemist, from whom I had it. But without dwelling farther on the evident unfitness of this empty-headed scion of the aristocracy to represent the important and enlightened borough of W——, and knowing of old your impatient temper, I come to the pith and purpose of this epistle. Lord W—— has not yet condescended to come down to the nutshell, from which, however, his lordship derives his title. He must first preside over a certain meeting, concerning

the natives of the Mabami islands, where, in the way of bishoprics, governorships, and secretaryships, there are certain nuts of which his lordship, I guess, would like to have the cracking. Well, my friend, his lordship will say very good things, but, *entre nous*, they will be all humbug. And now, if any one can just stand up and expose him, and cut him up in a handsome, gentlemanly way, you, John Owen, are the man!!!

“Will you strike a blow for the honour of W——? Then just write a few lines to James Morgan, Esq. He will be proud to call on you, and explain particulars. He is your townsman, a gentleman, and a scholar, and an enthusiastic admirer of your genius. I enclose his address.

“Think well on this, my friend; remember the land that gave you birth; allow her not to become the prey of aristocratic pride and scorn; for, as the poet saith:—”

Mr. Owen glanced hastily over the letter,

and perceiving that it held nothing more to the purpose than a string of quotations, he carelessly dropped it.

He bent his brow on his hand. Little he cared for the canal of W—— and W——'s patriotic mayor, and the silly scorn of a foolish noble. Still less did he care to heal wounded middle class pride by humbling aristocratic insolence. Yet he was not unconscious that within this opening might lie the germ of a whole political existence to come. The party to which Doctor Marsh belonged in W—— was a strong party, selfish and tenacious as the middle class is everywhere. They detested the democrats; they envied the aristocracy; and steered their course between both, jealous but strong. "How long will strength last with the middle class?" thought Owen, "who knows? fifty years, perhaps! No matter 'tis there now, and there let those above or below strive as they will, the true strength of the

country shall long stay. 'Tis well for some chivalrous noble to stand by his falling class, 'tis well for some heroic plebeian to try and raise his crushed brethren; but for one the tide is gone, and for the other 'tis not come, and for both it is useless folly to strive against the hour. Ay, Doctor Marsh, you are conceited and weak, and touchy, and you make bad quotations and worse puns, yet with you and the like of you now lies all true power, and to you they who wish to rise politically in their country must hold fast."

And for a long time he sat with folded arms revolving chances, weighing events and men, and mastering a whole world in his thoughts. At length he rose, and taking his hat, he slowly walked towards Miss Lee's house.

He knocked and Grace opened, for she was alone in the house. Her first words were to thank him for coming; then followed the eager

inquiry: "How did you leave them? how did it pass off? how are they?"

"Oh! very well, indeed. Mrs. Gerald was decorous and proper; Grace would not kiss Miss Blount. I left Mrs. Lee rather low, but you know her light temper, she will soon recover—and so you are alone to-day."

They sat in the parlour; the day was hot; the front blinds were drawn, and the half open back window let in a green glimpse of the tall trees that overshadowed the house. Their waving shadow played on the face of Grace; her head was sunk on her bosom; her hands were clasped on her knees; she sat mute and still dreaming of the two absent ones. For once he could look at her without the irritating consciousness that every glance was watched, that every word was commented. Deep noon stillness surrounded the whole place; solitude is sweet and dangerous; to be thus alone with her for the first time for weeks troubled his

very heart. "Thus," he thought, "if she were his wife, would it be." To constant agitation and fever would succeed long hours of repose. The calmness of domestic life; its stillness, deep as that of the hour, the contrast of its peace with the turmoil of his worldly existence, stole over his senses with subduing power. Again came to him the thoughts of the morning. At length Grace noticed his silence. She raised her head and asked what ailed him. Unable to reply, he turned his troubled face away. At once she was by his side.

"What has happened to them?" she exclaimed.

"Nothing, on my word."

"Well then, what has happened to you? You have heard bad news; your prospects are injured; tell me, John, tell me. I can bear it."

He drew her chair near his; he took her hand and made her sit down by him.

"Nothing has happened," he said, "my

prospects were never better, never more promising, but I must speak to you, Grace, I must. Do I err when I think you prefer no other friend to me—that I am more to you than a mere acquaintance? ”

Her heart was stirred at the question.

“You do not err,” she answered, quickly, “you do not err,” and her very voice trembled.

“Then let there be between us, Grace, a tie beyond that of mere acquaintance. I never can love you less than I do this day—you may like me more—but it is not of that I want to speak; I grant that in nothing will you change; yet still I say, let there be a tie between us beyond that of mere acquaintance. Give me the right to come and see you daily, to enjoy your presence and your friendship in peace. Give me the right, if need should be, to protect and defend you. Be my wife in name and in secret; let our marriage if you wish it be known to none save ourselves and God—let it

be a mere form, a ceremony, that shall leave our daily life unchanged; but that shall give it calmness and security. Thus shall slander and evil tongues and the world be silenced. Thus shall cease the fear of all that could wound your pride and drive me to extremities I should regret more for your sake than for mine, for remember, Grace, that come what may, I never will again see you wronged and insulted."

Grace started slightly. He resumed:

"Grace, do not say no. True, I ask from you your liberty, but it is because I cannot think you are treasuring it for a rival. I will not believe that it is, or can be so. I will not believe that if you will be nothing to me, you can be more to another. Grace, I could not see you daily, and nurse in my heart a thought so bitter and so tormenting!"

His lips trembled, and he grasped with unconscious force her hand, which he still held. The

bent face of Grace burned, and in broken words she told him not to fear, that more than he was to her, no other should ever be.

“Then, Grace, do not refuse me,” he said beseechingly. “You are alone in this arid world, grudge me not the right of being your true friend. Let me feel she seems solitary, yet she is not forsaken ; she seems defenceless, yet invisible affection watches jealously over her. Do not refuse me, Grace ; will I not leave you your true liberty, your independence, and your pride ? What do I ask ? A breath, a name to you, but every thing to me. Ay, let years, let life pass thus, it will still be something to think like the merchant whose rarest pearl had fallen in the deep sea : she is none the less mine though I cannot have her ? ”

Grace heard him and did not reply ; her hand trembled in his ; her heart beat so fast that she could not speak. She loved him, and she was weary of long denial. She too pined for calm-

ness and for rest. How easy it seemed to say, "Yes," and put an end to this endless strife. To injure him neither in his worldly prospects nor in his position, and yet to content him. To see him daily without scruple or fear, yet with entire liberty. Less than wife, more than betrothed, to deny herself and him the happiness of married life, yet to feel within her heart the sweetness and the sacredness of the marriage tie. But as the seducing temptation stole over her, the voice of dignity and pride said: "No, be all or be nothing to him." She did not speak, but he read it in her face; he bit his lip with ill-repressed anger, again he entreated, but with more imperiousness than eloquence. Grace resisted firmly though gaily. He saw that he could not prevail; he rose to go, wounded pride and disappointment struggling in his mien.

Grace looked at him. "Must I ever pain him?" she thought, and with one of those sudden impulses, which are both the greatest charm

and the most dangerous gift of woman's nature, she suddenly laid her hand on his arm, and said :

“ Be it as you like—I leave all to you.”

He turned round ; the flush of joy that crossed his face, the burning words in which he thanked her ought to have betrayed him, but when the heart is blind, can the eyes see.

He sat down by her ; in a few minutes everything was settled. She left all to him, and when he ceased speaking, merely said :

“ I trust in you.”

He was leaving her ; she stood by him : he took both her hands in his, and looked in her face.

“ Grace,” he said, “ promise you will keep your word with me—promise it no matter what comes. You know I am not patient. To be disappointed would be more than I could bear.”

“ Why what is to come ? ” asked Grace.

“ We may have an earthquake—anything,

but though heaven were to fall, promise, Grace, promise."

His vehemence startled, but did not frighten her. She smiled.

"Mr. Owen," she said, "was it not one of our people or one of our race that feared but one thing: lest heaven should fall?—I do not think you would fear even that."

He too smiled, but did not release her.

"You have not promised," he said again.

Grace laughed and reddened, and her hands still clasped in his, she half averted her head. Again he entreated her to promise. Suddenly she turned towards him, and said gaily:

"I promise all, Mr. Owen, but pray, let my hands go—you hurt me."

He dropped them at once, and was shocked to perceive that they wore in red and white streaks, the marks of his recent pressure. Again and again he asked her to forgive him.

"Forgive you! I did not know that you meant

to hurt me," she said smiling; and there was something so strange and so sweet in the smile, that again taking her hands, and raising them to his lips, he asked in a broken voice :

"Grace, is it possible that you love me?"

"Ay, Mr. Owen, I have already told you so—but in my way, not in yours."

"Ah! Grace, Grace," he thought, "my wife will not tell me that in a week; she dare not."

But he said nothing; he lingered a while longer with her; then remembering his engagement to dine with Mr. Hanley, he reluctantly left her. She followed him to the door, and standing on the threshold, she bade him adieu with a smile; trusting and confiding to the last; giving promises and asking none.

CHAPTER III.

MR. HANLEY was in the best of tempers.

“Why, Owen,” he cried, as soon as he saw him enter, “it is an age since I have seen you. What have you been doing? I have been to Calais and back enjoying the most delicious fish—took Jean Baptiste with me—there was no end to sauces and good wines; many a time I wished for you. Where were you? Not here in London all the time, surely?”

“Indeed I was, Mr. Hanley; I like London, you know.”

“Well, well, economy and prudence are fine virtues in a young man,” patronisingly said Mr. Hanley; “yet if I had known that, Owen, I

would have sent you down to Eden for a few days: the scent of the roses would have done you good."

"You have bought it?" dryly observed Owen.

"I? No, what should I do with it? Would you like to buy it?"

"I am not rich enough," replied Mr. Owen, unmoved by the taunt; "but if it were to let"—

"It is to be let," interrupted Mr. Hanley, sneering. "The owner has just died, and his son not feeling romantic on the subject of his father's first loves, will either let or sell it with pleasure. I can give you the name of the agent, if you like."

"Thank you; I shall be very glad of it."

"Oh! you mean to take it, do you?"

"Yes; I feel the want of country air, and I think as you say, that the scent of the roses will do me good."

He spoke seriously. Mr. Hanley stared, and looked uneasy. Had his *protégé* suddenly got

rich? For more reasons than one he hoped not.

In the meanwhile Owen thought: "If any thing can please Grace, it is Eden. Would I could buy it for her. Who knows but I may, yet. When we are fairly married, I shall take her there to see Lily and little Grace—any pretence will do—she will wait and linger a few hours in the garden—then I will tell her all; she will be angry—but she is a woman; she will forgive the cheat for the sake of the love—she will remain."

"Mr. Owen," testily said Mr. Hanley, throwing down his spoon with disgust, "you amaze me, sir; you are not a fit person to dine with; you have no appreciation of the good things set before you. Your soup is cold, sir."

"There are oysters in that soup," solemnly replied Owen; "and you know of old, Mr. Hanley, I cannot endure oysters."

Mr. Hanley rang, and Monsieur Jean Baptiste was called up. "How chanced it that on a day

when Mr. Owen was to dine with him, oysters had in any shape appeared on the table?"

Monsieur Jean Baptiste was confounded. He slapped his forehead ; he had forgotten all about it ; he begged Mr. Owen's pardon a thousand times ; but though Mr. Owen graciously assured him of his forgiveness, Mr. Hanley was more severe and, turning judge, pronounced the following sentence : "Monsieur Jean Baptiste, if you do not surpass yourself before the end of the meal, in some way or other, and thus atone for the insult you have offered to Mr. Owen, I shall not dine at home to-morrow."

Monsieur Jean Baptiste turned pale at the threat, bowed humbly, and withdrew on tip-toe. Mr. Hanley sighed as the door closed upon him. "Really," he said, "I do not know how I had the heart to speak so harshly to the poor fellow ; I never said so much to him before. The fact is, Monsieur Jean Baptiste might do anything, I could not part from him. It was just the same

with one of his early masters and patrons, the Duc d'Estontemère, minister of Louis XVIII. He and Jean Baptiste came to words, and from words to what the French call *de fâcheuses extrémités*. Well, sir, the Duke got the worst of it. I dare say you think he turned him off. Sir, he kept him till the day of his death. He could not do without him—the power of genius, sir—the power of genius!”

The power of Monsieur Jean Baptiste's genius was still further exemplified at the dessert. By what magical process he had conjured up the fairy vision of sweets that appeared in succession before Mr. Owen, Mr. Hanley knew not—he was lost in surprise and admiration. Even Owen condescended to approve. Again Mr. Hanley wanted M. Jean Baptiste to appear; but this time, with the modesty of genius, the gifted cook was invisible.

But even the interesting subject of cookery must end by exhausting itself; Mr. Hanley

changed the theme; from one thing he went on to another, until at length he carelessly observed: "By the way, that mad woman lives in your house, does she not?"

"What mad woman?" quietly asked Owen.

"Miss Blount—Miss Bell, she calls herself."

"Yes; there is a Miss Bell, who lives above me."

"And whose real name is Blount. Why, you need make no mystery of it to me, Owen. I know all about it; she is to crush the Walton Company, and she has humbugged you into believing her rigmarole story; so much the worse for you, Owen—so much the worse for you."

Mr. Owen did not reply, but helped himself to some of M. Jean Baptiste's dainties.

"You see, Owen," continued Mr. Hanley affectionately, "I take an interest in you; I like you; and when I see you commit a blunder, I am sorry. That old fool has told you some cock-and-bull stories, and you, like a good-natured

young fellow, have believed her; however, it is not too late to be wise, and just leave her as you found her, eh!"

Mr. Owen impatiently pushed away his plate. "Mr. Hanley," he said, "you do not deal frankly with me; Miss Blount is no more an old fool than I am a good-natured young fellow. She is a shrewd, vindictive woman, I am an ambitious man of thirty-four. We both know what we are about. These three months I am pledged to her; I learned a fortnight ago that you had an interest in the welfare of the Walton Company. Had I known it earlier, I would not have made myself your opponent; for though you have not right on your side, I was not bound to show or prove it. Now I regret that it is too late."

Mr. Hanley's little dark eyes sparkled with anger; his sallow, wiry face, took a more yellow and bilious tinge.

"And so, sir," he began, "that is your gratitude, and my reward."

“Stop, sir,” interrupted Owen, with a slight frown; “before we discuss this point further, let us settle another matter. You were kind enough to lend me five hundred pounds; I am now fortunately able to repay you.” He took out his pocket-book, and handed Mr. Hanley a check. “And now,” he added, putting back his pocket-book, “now we can speak, sir. Delicacy need not keep you silent, nor too strong a sense of obligation forbid me to reply.”

At first Mr. Hanley remained silent; he was thunderstruck; when he spoke it was in the tone of a man whose feelings have been deeply wounded.

“Is that the way in which you treat me, Owen. Like a usurer—like a Shylock—Owen. You do not know me—you wrong me, Owen.”

Unmoved by these pathetic reproaches, Mr. Owen peeled a peach, and did not reply.

Then Mr. Hanley changed his theme; he appealed to interest; he dropped broad hints

that he could make it worth Owen's while to give up Miss Blount and keep fast to him. Mr. Owen was then contemplating how best he might cheat and deceive a woman, but that was quite another sort of thing from selling his honour for money to a man. He reddened, rose and looked for his hat. At once, Mr. Hanley, nearly upsetting the table in his eagerness, started up and seized his guest by the button-hole.

"Owen," he said, "do not go yet. Why, you foolish fellow, you have not done your dinner. Come man, sit down, and just hear me out. There's my niece Annie, you know Annie, she shall have a handsome portion one of these days. Why not marry Annie and stick by me, John?"

Mr. Owen bit his lip to repress a smile. He had seen a little curly-headed girl, of twelve or so, who occasionally paid Mr. Hanley a visit; this was his proffered bride. "Thank you, Mr.

Hanley," he said, seriously, "but Miss Hanley strikes me as being rather young—I fear I should lose patience."

"Pooh, pooh, you are in a mighty hurry to be tied for life. Why when do you want to get married?"

"In a day or two, please heaven!" piously replied Mr. Owen.

Mr. Hanley was confounded. "That's where the five hundred pounds comes from," he thought; "to think of that fellow having already picked up a fortune."

"Well, well," he said aloud, "there is no help for it. Of course if you marry Miss—What did you say her name was?"

"I did not mention her name."

"Well, no matter; if you marry her after to-morrow, you certainly cannot marry Annie in a year or so. I am sorry, Owen; I like you, and thought to have you for my nephew, and leave you and Annie my little hoard. However,

the will of heaven be done, and now sit down and drink your wine, and let us leave that Miss Blount and the Walton Company alone for the time being."

Mr. Owen complied, and made himself good company, and Mr. Hanley, who was like the world, and who thought people agreeable and entertaining according to their position in life, and who now looked on Owen as a thriving, successful man, no longer in want of his aid, began seriously to wish for the accomplishment of a plan that had not entered his mind before that day. He would have given the five hundred pound check, that still lay on the table, for Annie to be sixteen instead of twelve. "Aggravating little monkey," he thought, "could she not be born a few years earlier." And spite of the fatal objection, he again urged the point, but Mr. Owen remained inexorable. Miss Annie Hanley was a second time rejected.

"The other one must be very rich," thought

Mr. Hanley, and he vainly tried to guess who that wealthy bride could be. Unable to succeed, he attacked Mr. Owen on a point he little expected.

“By the way,” he suddenly said, “I want you to do me a favour, Owen. You remember Lord W—— surely. He takes his title from some place or other in Wales—capital good fellow, who can eat a dinner and drink a bottle of wine with any one. Now here’s the plain truth of the matter. W—— is going to make a speech at some meeting or other next week but one, and what is the worst of it, it shall be his own speech too, for on that point he is obstinate. Now he wants some clever fellow to support him, and to tell you the truth, Owen, I have promised that you would, so you must e’en redeem my word. I cannot for certain reasons of my own have anything to do with the matter.”

“I regret that I cannot oblige you,” coldly replied Owen, “but it is impossible.”

“Impossible ! Why so ? Political opinions ; humbug. John Owen ! you know you are like me, you have none.”

“I beg your pardon, I have political opinions, and very decided ones too. What man who thinks can be without opinions ? But if you mean that I belong to no political party, you are quite right. I respect men too little to fight under any of their banners. However, with regard to Lord W——, my part is clear. What have I to do with helping in any way the born foe of the class in which it so chances that I was born ! For that class I declare it frankly I have little or no respect. Yet such as it is, I belong to it ; its interests are mine ; my interests are blended with its existence. The two-floored house I live in, is an indifferent house ; I confess it ; narrow, uncomfortable, unromantic, vulgar, by no means to my taste ; but my lease is life-long, I must live in it, and whilst I do live in it,

Mr. Hanley, I cannot help to repair and adorn the feudal castle, a noble abode, I acknowledge, one that has stood proudly on the hill for a thousand years and more, but with which John Owen, the grandson of the Jew, the son of the pawnbroker, has nothing in common."

"Which means," testily said Mr. Hanley, "that you will not do what I ask of you."

"Precisely."

"Very well, sir; very well. I shall know what to think in future. Very well, sir."

He looked deeply offended; Mr. Owen made no attempt to pacify him; the conversation languished, then ceased; they parted coldly.

Mr. Owen went home, sat down, and wrote a note to James Morgan, Esq.; then he went up-stairs to Miss Blount. He found her sitting with Lily. Mrs. Gerald's face brightened on seeing him, and with her usual impertinent frankness, she cried:

"Oh! what an angel you are to come! I

felt so dull!—Well, you need not give me such a look; Miss Blount and I have come to a right understanding. I am, as indeed I always did, to say what I like. Besides, she does not spare me; she has just been telling me that I have no heart, and, dreadful to add, that I have lost all my good looks. Is that true, Mr. Owen?" she added, looking so lovely and so seducing that even he, little of a flatterer as he was, could not but reply:

"No, indeed! I have known you some years; you never looked handsomer."

Lily laughed triumphantly and tossed up her work. And Mr. Owen looked at her with involuntary admiration. Her black dress gave her beauty a freshness and a glow he had seldom seen so vividly; her dark blue eyes seemed all light; her fair hair flowing back was tied behind like nymph tresses; her Grecian profile, her laughing lips, her pearl-like teeth, her neck so slender and so fair, had an ideal grace.

Involuntarily he felt her beauty in his very heart, for it was the beauty of a syren, not to be gazed on so long with impunity.

Lily did not seem to heed his fixed glance; but Miss Blount saw it, and laying by her work looked at him attentively across the table.

“Good-night, Mr. Owen,” cried Lily, suddenly starting up: “I dare say you want to speak to Miss Blount, and think me in the way. Good-night, ma’am.”

And flinging her arm around Miss Blount’s neck, she gave her two or three kisses, which the dragon received rather coldly; then she dropped Mr. Owen a curtsey and vanished.

“Any news?” asked Miss Blount, when the door had closed upon her.

“I have been dining with Mr. Hauley.”

“And drinking good wine, John. You are flushed.”

Owen started. “Miss Blount, you insult me! Am I, a man of intellect, ever likely to become

the slave of the senses? Pshaw!" He looked quite scornful.

"Have a little more of the senses about you; it will do you good. Men all mind are either saints or demons. And I will be frank, John Owen, I do not' over and above like your looks to-night."

He laughed, and asked what ailed his looks.

"Many things; amongst the rest, you look unlucky."

Mr. Owen was not without superstition. The words struck him as an omen of ill. His thoughts flew to Grace. "She is a strange proud creature," he thought; "let her but suspect, and she will vanish and be seen no more. And even, after to-morrow, in Eden she may break from me like a wild bird; or worse still, she may feign to submit, and when I think myself most secure, melt away from my grasp like the cloudy Juno clasped by vain-glorious Ixion! Oh! that it were

well over, and she happy and contented with her lot."

"Now, Mr. Owen, what for are you gnawing your lip at that rate?" asked Miss Blount, who was watching him curiously. He recovered at once.

"As I told you, I dined with Mr. Hanley. We came to an explanation and parted coolly, and you are five hundred pounds poorer than you were this morning."

"You did well, John; never mind the money; I can afford it, and more. What did he say?"

"He wanted to bribe me first with money, then with a little girl."

"A little girl!"

"Yes, his niece Annie; he would have trafficked with her as coolly as if she were a bag of money. He wanted me to marry her some four or five years hence. I declined; and so would Annie, I fancy, had she been consulted."

"And so he wanted you to marry his niece; he, the shrewd calculating man of the world.

Ay, ay, he knew what he was about. Well, Mr. Owen, you did well to decline ; if you want a wife, you need not take a little red-haired girl."

"She is not red-haired," interrupted Mr. Owen, smiling.

"Nor wait so long," continued Miss Blount.

He did not answer the remark, but resumed :
"To mend matters, he wanted me to support Lord W——."

"That fool ! How, and why so ?"

In a few words Mr. Owen gave her the substance of Doctor Marsh's letter. Miss Blount heard him with deep attention. When he ceased she laid her hand on his arm, and fastening on his face her keen bright eyes, she said : "John Owen, you are a rising man ; the world seeks you, and if you wish it you can become one of its masters. Be wise ; do no man's work but your own. I know something of all this business. The people of W—— no more wish for the Lord Mayor and his canal than for Lord W——.

They are sick of one—they hate the other. Let a third candidate step in, one who has spirit, tact, and boldness; he will win the day. Why should not you be that man?"

"Why," very quietly replied Owen, "for one excellent reason to begin with,—I have not the property qualification."

"I could qualify you," quickly answered Miss Blount, with sparkling eyes. "Why will you not be wise? *She* likes you very well; you seem to like her; you certainly looked at her long and hard enough this evening. Be wise, John Owen, take the rich and handsome wife that will help you on to power and to wealth."

Mr. Owen smiled unmoved.

"'Tis very odd," he said, "how people must needs want me to marry a girl or a woman I do not want; and how no one will help me to the one I do want."

"Why, who can help you?" impatiently asked Miss Blount.

"I wish you could," he said, rising and pacing the room up and down.

"I would not, Mr. Owen."

"Yes you would, Miss Blount," he said, turning round smiling, "I would make you. Let me tell you a tale," he added, sitting down by her. "I had a friend once; he had conceived a passion for a girl whom he at length persuaded to marry him; but though she consented, he could not for the life of him tell whether or not she cared a rush for him. Their marriage was to be secret and nominal."

"Why so?" asked Miss Blount.

"It was thus agreed between them."

"Foolish!"

"So he thought; and therefore when they were married he took her to a pleasant home which he had prepared for her; there he confessed he had deceived her. How do you think it ended?"

Miss Blount looked hard at him.

"Why," she said, "if the woman was like nine out of ten, a silly fool, she thought it a fine bold thing for her lover to do, and liked him all the better for it."

"A silly fool she was not."

"Or, again, if she was fond and weak, she submitted out of very imbecility."

"She was not weak."

"But if she was proud,—was she proud, Mr. Owen?"

"She was a good woman, but she was a proud one."

"Well, then, she never forgave him?"

"I beg your pardon, she did; and they lived as long and as happily together as people in a book."

Miss Blount smiled and shook her head.

"Had I been your friend," she said, "I would not have trusted to that. A truly proud woman may, when thus entrapped and deceived, submit, because she cannot help herself; she may even

forgive—forgiveness is an act of the will—but forget!—she cannot forget.”

“But she must, and she shall,” thought Owen, biting his lip. “Well,” he resumed aloud, “I have written to that James Morgan, Esq., and mean to try my luck as a political man. We will just let his lordship the Lord Mayor be elected for this once, and later when the property qualification has come, we shall see.”

Miss Blount looked at him very earnestly. He stood before her confident and smiling.

“Ay, ay,” she said, “you will do; strength rules all; the world goes to strength. You will do, too, for a political man. You are bold and fearless; you have the ready speech, the sarcasm keener than a sword, the gift, too, to know when to be silent. Ay, you will do. But why wait? Listen to me: I am richer than I seem; if I live in this poor way, ’tis because it pleases me. Let the Walton Company fare as it will, Mary Ann Blount is still a rich woman. To Lily, if she

behaves well, I will leave the largest part of my property; to you I have for some time meant to bequeath a freehold I have in the west of England, and that will more than qualify you for parliament. Well, John, I may as well let you have it now as after I am dead and gone; not that I think you will have long to wait, but the opportunity might not return, and so say the word and 'tis all settled. I speak without conditions; marry Lily or not,—you are free?”

Mr. Owen looked at her keenly.

“Perhaps you wonder at all this,” said Miss Blount; “well, every one to his or her fancy. I like you for many reasons; you are no flatterer, no sycophant; you are bold, enterprising, made to succeed in life. 'Tis a pleasure to help such; and then I like you too, Mr. Owen, for a reason you little suspect. You can love a woman faithfully. I have tempted you with beauty and money, and power, and your heart has not swerved from her whom you love—not one

moment. A rare constancy, Mr. Owen, in your sex."

"And yet you wanted me to turn faithless, Miss Blount."

"Ay, and would still—for I think it would be better for you. I see little chance of happiness in your violent passion for this dark or brown girl. She was born under a bright, but ill-fated star. Like a Princess in a fairy tale, one by one her gifts have deserted her. Take warning and cling not to ill-luck; you smile. Ay, let it be—and now answer me: do you accept or reject my offer?"

"Indeed, 'tis not a thing to reject, Miss Blount," he said, with sparkling eyes; "I may fail, but even failure is something."

"Then it is settled, and now Mr. Owen, leave me; I am tired."

"You are not well," he said, attempting to feel her pulse.

"Pshaw," she replied, withdrawing her hand:

"'tis but my old pain. None of your quackery! Why, that you left medicine for the law is one of the things I like you for. Jane, light Mr. Owen down stairs. Good night."

He went down to his own rooms, and there he sat and thought till morning. He thought of many things, and then all closed in Grace. Did he repent his intended treachery? He did not. Perhaps she had tried him too far. Perhaps his hour for a great fall had come.

Mr. Owen had ever held deceit one of the very meanest tools that a man's hand can take up. In his poorest days, to build up his lowest fortunes, he had scorned to use it. And if what he had not done for ambition, he was now recklessly resolved to do for passion, the sadder and the deeper was his sin.

For he was resolved. "I will know the truth," he thought. "She shall love or detest me. If she loves, she will stay in Eden and forgive. If she does not love, let her go, be free and hate

me. Irrevocably bound to me as I to her, must not and shall not love ultimately spring out of her very hatred ? ”

That Grace might scorn and despise him, Mr. Owen did not admit to his own thoughts ; perhaps because he could not have borne the mere idea for one second of time ; perhaps because his pride, which was great, and not merely great, but deep, and set in his very inmost heart—a part of that heart as his heart was a part of his being—made him think he could afford to do that which to another man’s honour would have been death.

We say perhaps, for we know not ; we paint not what John Owen should have been, but what he was or seemed to be : a man great in some things, in others very little : as are all men whose conscience is pride.

CHAPTER IV.



GRACE stood in her room before her mirror. She had put by her black attire, and wore a plain white dress; her cheeks were flushed; her eyes were bright as diamonds; her lips smiled unconsciously. Youth and its freshness beamed in her aspect. She clasped her hands on her bosom, and smiled at her own image.

“I am glad,” she thought, “glad and happy; this is my marriage-day; to-day shall my destiny sink down into calmness and repose: to-day I bid adieu to liberty and its cares—twenty-six years of freedom I have had—bright years full of pictures, years of joy, pride and delight;—but solitary years. And now, adieu

to solitude. I have seen it in his look and in his aspect; the tide is with him—he will soon be prosperous, soon be strong—he can brave the world, and I can share his life. Oh! I was born under a happy star—for when the world, and the world's gifts left me, there remained to me the priceless gem, the gem a queen's crown cannot purchase—of a true and faithful love.”

“Please, ma’am, Mr. Owen is below,” said Phœbe’s voice at the door.

Grace turned round smiling; and Phœbe, who knew nothing, smiled at her mistress’s radiant face.

Mr. Owen was pacing up and down the parlour below. On hearing her enter he turned towards her; his face was as pale and rigid as hers was bright and smiling. They had not met since he had dined with Mr. Hanley; he sat down by her and anticipating her questions he assured her that everything was as she could wish.

"Tell me nothing," she hastily interrupted. "I have left it all to you. All is right; I want to know nothing; but I do want to speak to you, Mr. Owen."

He bit his lip, and looked impatient. He little knew the confession Grace was meditating. She was proud, and love is brave. She knew herself, and she knew her lover. She knew she could not be even in name the wife of a man so imperious and so passionate, and hope to preserve her secret for more than a few weeks, yet she felt, too, that to yield to the weakness of a moment, to betray it or have it wrung from her in some fond hour, would humble her for ever.

"I will brave," she thought, "the peril I cannot elude. I will tell him all: he shall know how dear he is to the very heart and life of Grace Lee; nothing will I hide from him, nothing. I marry him for love, and must he for a moment think 'tis for a meaner motive!" Her pride rose at the thought, and stronger than

shame, bade her speak. She raised her eyes to his; they were fastened on her face with a strange expression of uneasiness. There was something in his face, keen and too searching that arrested the words on her lips.

“You had something to say,” he observed, slowly. “What is it, Grace?”

She did not reply; he resumed:

“You have heard something that makes you uneasy.”

“Nothing, indeed.”

“Then you are uneasy at something that has risen in your own thoughts. What is it, Grace?”

Grace was too troubled to reply. Her head was sunk on her bosom—her face was burning. How tell what he was so far from divining? Besides it had seemed so easy—and it was so hard.

“Grace,” he said, “you pain me—tell me what it is; do not keep me in suspense.”

He looked flushed and irritated.

"'Tis nothing, 'tis nothing," hastily said Grace, "I had a dream last night."

"A dream! What dream?"

"A strange one: I have but just now remembered it. I dreamt I stood with you by a broad river; when suddenly it rose and flowed between us, and though I looked until my eyes ached, I saw you no more."

"Do you believe in dreams?"

"Sometimes."

"Ah! Grace, Grace, what thoughts have brought such dreams to you? Hear me, Grace; hear me, and believe me." He passed his right arm around her and twining his other hand in the thick waves of her dark hair; he looked down into her upraised face. He was a hard man—too cynical by half; but he was also a passionate and imaginative man, and when his heart was stirred, the ardent language of passion could fall from his lips.

"Grace," he said, "let your hair be white as

snow, let age pass over us both, let years, let depth of calamity, let sickness, let poverty, let shame be heaped upon you in their full excess, my very heart shall still be bound as fast in you, as you, Grace, are bound in my arms this moment."

His face was pale with the passion of his words; his brow was knit; his lip trembled. Grace lay mute in his clasp; she did not speak, she did not breathe, she was not frightened, but subdued like one in a storm. He was the first to recover. He rose; she rose too, and bound up her falling tresses, and he with a lover's fondness arrested her hand.

"Not yet," he entreated; "let me see you so a moment longer."

Grace did not reply; she did not hear him; she was listening. Carriage wheels were rolling to the door; they stopped; a loud knock followed.

"I shall see what it is," hastily said Mr. Owen.

He left the room; Phœbe had already opened the door; he saw a cab with luggage, and

stepping down from it, no less a person than Doctor Crankey.

He endeavoured to put Phœbe away; it was too late; Grace had passed by them both, and, running down the door step, she had thrown her arm around Doctor Crankey's neck.

"Ay, it is all over for to-day," thought Mr. Owen, turning pale with disappointment and wrath.

"Oh! Doctor Crankey, Doctor Crankey," cried Grace, half laughing, half crying, "what could make you come in this sudden way?"

"Not my will, child," replied Doctor Crankey, entering with her; "but just that I am getting blind—that is all."

Grace laughed.

"Blind!" she echoed, "is that why you do not see Mr. Owen?"

"Yes, I do. How are you, John? And so you live here, child—well 'tis good to have a home, and let us always bless Providence."

He entered the parlour, and sat down on the

first chair he found. He looked worn and weary ; his eyes too seemed weak. Grace sat down by him, and stroking his wrinkled cheek, she gazed wistfully in his face.

“ You have been working too hard,” she said, “ they have made you work too hard in Rome.”

“ Not they—not they,” quickly replied Doctor Crankey ; “ why child, they would not let me work at all—said the manuscripts hurt my eyes—in short, sent me back here—all for the good of my health,” he added with a forced laugh.

Grace saw this hid some secret wound. She said no more. She unfastened the heavy cloak which Doctor Crankey wore ; she told Phœbe to bring him some refreshment. She went out and caused his luggage to be brought in, she sent away the cabman ; she had a room prepared for Doctor Crankey upstairs, she spoke of his study, of shelves for his books, and finally asked what he thought of the newly discovered Chaldaic Bible in the British Museum.

“Why I have heard nothing about it,” said Doctor Crankey, surprised; “a newly discovered Chaldaic Bible, when and where, child?”

“Ask Mr. Owen. He told me.”

She turned to Owen, who was pacing the room up and down in a fever of irritation and unrest. Reluctantly he complied with the bidding of her look, and, sitting down, briefly told Doctor Crankey all he knew. In the meanwhile Phœbe brought in the tray, and Grace persuaded the old man to eat, and what between the newly discovered Chaldaic Bible and some tea, Doctor Crankey forgot his failing sight and his wrongs.

“It must be a grand thing, certainly,” he musingly observed; “well, well, I am not sorry to be back—I shall certainly go to the British Museum to-morrow.”

“To-morrow,” thought Owen. “Ay, then, that would do; but how persuade Grace to remain in Eden, and forsake the old man whom she loves—she never will.” He gnawed his lip

and vainly sought for an issue to this new difficulty. He found none. Grace seemed charmed with Doctor Crankey's return. She leaned her head on his shoulder ; she passed her white hand in his grey locks, she stroked his chin and smoothed his cheek ; she smiled, she talked, she laughed, and looked as pleased as Mr. Owen was discontented. Yet, he, too, did his best to please the old man ; he did not forget that Doctor Crankey had once been his ally ; already his fertile brain schemed and planned how best to secure his aid again. He searched in his memory for every scrap of learned news with which to regale him ; he entered deep into discussions for which he cared not, and finally he told him of an oculist who performed miracles in the way of sight curing. Doctor Crankey's face brightened ; he seized Mr. Owen's hand and grasped it eagerly.

“ God bless you, John,” he said, “ God bless you. You see, my sight is as good as ever, John, only I cannot see quite so well as I used to, that

is all. The manuscripts I cannot manage; print and writing are as easy to me as ever. Give me a book, Grace, and you shall see. Pshaw! child," he added, in a nettled tone, as she purposely handed him a volume in large print, "why, a blind man could read that! Give me writing, any writing—there that will do," he said, picking up a folded paper from the floor, and opening it, he read hesitatingly:

"I hereby undersigned, acknowledge the receipt—' Pooh, pooh! what cramped hand is that?" and he put it away impatiently.

But Grace, looking over his shoulder, had read to the end. It was the agent's receipt for a month's rent of Eden, paid by Mr. Owen. Startled and astonished, she raised her glance to his face; it was burning with conscious guilt; her dark eyes beamed for a moment upon him full of reproach and pride, then turned away.

He could not bear this; he rose to go; he left. Grace did not attempt to detain him. She

remained talking with Doctor Crankey until the old man thought he would like to go up-stairs. Miss Lee left him in his room, and with an unusually thoughtful brow, she went down to the wild garden at the back of the house. Yet garden it could scarcely be called; it was but a narrow grass-grown square of earth, which a high wall and tall trees kept in perpetual gloom. As she slowly walked along the dark, damp path, strewn with fallen leaves, Grace started slightly to perceive Mr. Owen walking towards her, with folded arms and downcast eyes. He did not see her until they stood within a few paces of one another; he looked at her fixedly, and was the first to speak:

“Well,” he said, in a deliberate, hard voice, “you know all, Miss Lee. Pray, do not spare your reproaches. I am quite prepared—I know what I deserve. You trusted in me, and I meant to deceive you.”

And now in her turn Grace looked at him fixedly.

When a woman has the misfortune to love a man who falls into great error, two courses are open to her; to discard him at once and for ever from her presence and her heart, or to forgive him, not with tears, not with gentle reproaches, and mild admonitions, but fully, nobly, magnanimously; with that forgiveness of complete oblivion which, like royal clemency, ennobles her who gives, and cannot degrade him who receives. A man has never been worth anything who is not worth forgiving once, and above all things, forgiving silently. Grace smiled wistfully in Mr. Owen's face, and holding out her hand, she said :

“Mr. Owen, let us forget to-day—let us be friends.”

He accepted her proffered hand, yet how passionately, if he dared, would he not have rejected the gift. If he did not, if, spite of struggling pride, his haughty face bent over it, all-mastering Love alone knew why.

CHAPTER V.



YET he left her more angry than repentant. He regretted not the ungenerous attempt to deceive her, but the failure and its shame. "Ah!" he thought, as he sat in his own home, "if Fate had but given me a few hours more, if I could but once have got her to Eden, the day would have been mine. Bound by marriage, by circumstance, by strong and prevailing passion, Grace would have yielded!" And tormenting Fancy came, with her train of images. He saw himself in the fair garden, sitting by the side of Grace. He felt the fresh breeze on his fevered brow; the sweet odour of the roses stole over his senses; he heard himself confessing his fraud:

“Grace, expect Lily no more ; she will not come ; this spot is your home, our home—and here, by all the laws of God and man, you, Grace, must stay with me.” He heard her reproaches, her tears, closing in forgiveness—he felt the sense of calmness and of peace with which his head sank on her shoulder, as his hand clasped hers ; for there was this much virtue in his love, that it ever looked forward to repose ; that, through all the unquietness and fever of passion, he was haunted with the sense of a pure and holy rest unwon. From this dream he woke to the consciousness of his solitude, to the stinging remembrance of the calmness with which Grace had heard his angry confession.

“Proud girl !” he thought, “she knows not passion and its temptations. The fever that I have felt for a year and a half has never troubled her blood. In calmness and in peace has she spent the days I have for her sake wasted in agitation and torment ! Well may she

triumph to-day over her baffled lover—fond fool, who cheated to win a wife, as other men to win a mistress!”

He loved her, but he was a proud man, unused to the heart's servitude. For a whole week, he went not near Grace: at length his pride gave way; to see her became a thirst, a longing not to be repressed.

Late one evening, when she sat quietly reading to Doctor Crankey in the parlour, by lamp-light, he suddenly appeared before both. Doctor Crankey, displeased with the interruption, received him crossly. Grace slowly raised her eyes from the book on her knees, and smiled in her lover's face with conscious triumph. He sat opposite her; the light fell on her face, lit with a vermilion glow, on her clear brow, and dark hair. “Ay,” he thought, “to-day is yours, but mine is yet to come, Grace; cold and proud as you are, I will be repaid for all this with a love and a fondness you little dream of now.”

Glad to see him again, Grace was all mirth. She laughed, she talked gaily. In vain Doctor Crankey said "Pish!" and chid her, half angrily; her heart was light, and Grace was merry. Age is perverse; Doctor Crankey was offended with her gaiety; in a huff, he rose and bade both her and Mr. Owen an abrupt good-night. Grace knew him, she did not attempt to detain him—which would have been perfectly useless—yet she was sorry, and when he was gone, she leaned her cheek upon her hand with sudden seriousness. When she looked up, Mr. Owen was sitting by her in Doctor Crankey's chair.

"What have you been doing this whole week?" she asked.

"I have been busy."

"With what?"

But the time was gone when Mr. Owen could like to impart to Grace the story of his daily life; troubled passion is averse to the confidence of calm affection. He told her briefly about the

meeting, and his intended part in it. Grace heard him with sparkling eyes.

“And so,” she said, “you are going to enter deeper into the swift stream of active life—you do well, Mr. Owen, it will bear you on, and it is powerless to submerge you. And when is that meeting to be?”

“To-morrow week.”

“Would it were to-morrow,” she exclaimed impatiently. “Well, a week is soon passed—I suppose I shall not see much of you—do you know I am uneasy about Doctor Crankey, his sight is really bad, and then I see there is something on his mind he will not tell me. You saw how my laughing annoyed him—I never knew him so before.”

“I did and often,” sharply replied Owen, who did not like to see her thoughts diverted from himself to Doctor Crankey. Grace looked pained; he saw it and resumed rather bitterly:

“I beg your pardon, Miss Lee. I see you

are offended. I wound you in all you hold dear. I beg your pardon."

"I would have you love what I love," she said, "and I cannot. I never could make you like Lily; when she was gone you were glad; and now that I like the old man who reared me and who taught you, seems to offend you, Mr. Owen."

"You would have me love what you love; vain hope, Miss Lee! I can love but one being in this wide world. You are right when you say I never could like Mrs. Gerald. I never could whilst I saw you lavishing on her, a beautiful but faithless image, treasures of affection. Doctor Crankey I like as much as I can like what is not you. I like him because he reared you, because he taught me, but more for your sake than for mine, Miss Lee."

Grace looked at him wistfully; his face was dark as night, his tone was very bitter; she saw that he suffered; but she saw also that

Time alone could heal the wound. She did not seem to heed his bitterness or his gloom; she was gay and free as ever, and as kindly as ever, when at length he rose to go, she said: "Come to-morrow."

He came—he came daily. Several days he came twice; never had he so felt the want of her presence; never had to be near her haunted him so much like a thirst and a fever. And yet all the time he was deep in work, and the world's life and ambitious schemes absorbed him; but even as passion only quickened their activity, so they only rendered passion more intense. Yet he was not happy; this was to him a time of trouble and of pain, as ever is a mood too excited; a feeling overstrained. Grace had never breathed a word of reproach; she was kind, she was friendly; but there was something in her calmness, in her serenity, that stung and tormented him. He felt in a burning desert, and she sat in cool shade; her

gaiety seemed to him a triumph over his defeat, her kindness mere pity, and her pity was harder to bear than her indifference. The time had been when a few words from her could heal every wound; that time was gone; suffering made him bitter and unjust. Grace saw and forgave it; but she said to herself: "This soon must cease."

He too said it. Love is a chain that will not bind less than two captives, and Mr. Owen seeing Grace so happy and so free, fretted over his solitary bonds, until at length he would, and perhaps could, bear no more; he fixed within his own mind the limits he would give to endurance, and in the meanwhile he sunk into a sullen rest that was not peace.

A week had thus passed; but a week can be wide as a world. The day of the meeting came round: two hours before the time Mr. Owen called on Miss Lee.

It was evening, and he found her sitting

alone and writing. On hearing him enter, she raised her face. There was something bright and radiant in her aspect he long remembered, something that affected him then, even to pain.

"I am alone," she said, "Doctor Crankey went out this afternoon to the oculist's; he has not yet returned. He will surely bring good tidings—I cannot tell you how gay, how happy I feel—something, some great happiness will surely befall me to-night. It is a presentiment."

He looked at her; she was unusually flushed; he said she was feverish.

Grace laughed. "Feverish," she replied, "then truly fever is delightful; but how worn, how harassed, you look, Mr. Owen. Ah! you have not told me all—I saw it yesterday—I saw it the day before—you had on your mind a world of care you would not tell me."

And so he had, a world of cares in which she had no part.

"It is all over now," he replied calmly. "But I have had to struggle hard. Mr. Hanley had been at work, he had seduced from me my own supporters, Morgan and the rest. However I brought them back to due allegiance, and for the present Mr. Hanley is defeated, but it was not easy."

"Why you look quite ill," said Grace concerned.

"Nothing worse than fatigue ails me. I sat up these two last nights. It could not be helped."

"But now you can rest awhile," said Grace, "lay down your head on the couch on which you are sitting, and sleep, were it but for ten minutes."

He refused; she insisted; and to please her he yielded; but sleep came not near him; he closed his eyes, yet so as still to see her, and as he looked his mind received, as in a clear mirror, the quiet and distinct picture his eyes

beheld. The night was stormy, and a loud wind moaned without ; within all was peace. The room was large ; the light of the lamp fell in a bright circle on and around the broad table, and left all beyond in dull and vague darkness. It half lit the face and figure of Grace. She sat within a few paces of him ; she had resumed her writing, and seemed intent on the task. Her head was bent ; her left hand supported it, and was half hidden in her hair ; it gleamed white as antique marble in her dark tresses ; on her arm, partly bare, he saw a red coral bracelet—a serpent, emblem of eternity. Idly he noted these things, as we note things in a dream, and they remained ever linked in his mind with the bright glow of the lamp in the dark room, with the strong murmur of the wind sweeping around the old house.

And still Grace wrote on ; her eyes remained fixed on the page ; her parted lips smiled ; she seemed absorbed and entranced.

“Ay, Grace,” he thought, as he watched her, “write on, and think me calmly sleeping whilst you are by. The day may yet come when I shall sleep though you are near, but with my head on your lap, and your arms—cold and shy as you are now—around me.”

Grace had ceased writing; she folded the paper—it was a letter—then pressed it to her lips with a long and lingering kiss. Mr. Owen made a slight movement; Grace hastily slipped the paper in her bosom, and raising the lamp, turned round towards him.

“You are awake,” she said.

“Yes, and you have done your writing. I know it is a letter for Mrs. Gerald Lee. I dare say I shall see her to-night—you may give it to me.”

“When you come back,” replied Grace, smiling, “for you must come to-night, you know, and tell me how you have fared.”

“The meeting will not be over till late.”

"I shall sit up."

"Better wait until to-morrow."

"On your peril come to-morrow. And now, Mr. Owen, go; it is time."

"Come and sit by me," he said, entreatingly, "just for five minutes, and then I will go."

"Sit by you! What for?"

"I feel faint-hearted."

"Not you."

He stretched out his hand; she lightly eluded his grasp, and was round the other side of the table in a moment. Laughing, she looked across. She seemed strangely gay and mirthful. "Go," she said once more.

"I cannot. What ails you to-night—there is something in your face would keep me here for hours."

And his eyes were fastened on it as if they could not leave it again.

"For hours!" said Grace, with mock gravity;

"that looks serious, Mr. Owen. Better go at once."

"You are right." And he rose.

"And now be sure and come back," she said, raising her hand warningly; "and be sure and succeed, else I know not what I shall do to you."

"And if I do succeed, Grace, will you be as kind to me as you were a while ago to Mrs. Gerald Lee's letter?"

Grace reddened very much; but she said:

"How so?"

"Will you give me what you gave that foolish paper?"

Grace looked at him; the glow had not left her cheek, but her eyes laughed at him with mocking light.

"A kiss," she replied; "one," and she waved her hand with assumed disdain. "I am not so stingy, Mr. Owen; make a good speech and I will give you three."

“Take care, Grace, I shall make you keep your word.”

“I never break my word, Mr. Owen.”

“Ah! but I shall expect more than your word, Grace; not kind words, though pleasant; not caresses, though sweet, shall content me. I warn you, I feel in the exacting mood.”

“I know a cure for all such moods,” said Grace, with a half smile; “an infallible cure, Mr. Owen.”

“What cure?”

“I will not say another word. Go. I am tired of your company. Good-night.”

He looked at his watch; it was, indeed, time to go; she took the lamp and lit him out herself; they stood in the gloomy passage. Through the half open door there came a glimpse of the dark cloudy night, and of the cab waiting for Mr. Owen. Grace stood by him; the light of the upraised lamp fell full on her face. Before she could be aware of his intent, his arm was around her, and bending over her; he said:

“Grace, give me one of the three you promised me. Give, or I shall take.”

“You dare not,” replied Grace, smiling proudly in his face.

And she was right; he dare not; he dare not offend her so for the sake of an idle caress. But the words stung him. Grace saw him redden and bite his lip.

“You dare not,” she resumed; “and you would not, Mr. Owen—you are much too proud to take what is not given to you?”

And this, too, was true; he felt it, and partly soothed he released her, saying:

“You are right, Grace, I am.”

“And now go,” she said seriously; “go, succeed, and come back to tell me of your triumph.”

“What! no matter at what hour?”

“Ay, indeed, no matter at what hour.”

She gave him her hand; he raised it to his lips; she smiled; they parted. Grace saw him enter the cab, and heard him drive away. Then,

still in the passage, she called on Phœbe, who promptly appeared at the head of the staircase.

“Is everything ready?” hastily asked Grace.

“Yes, ma’am, Mrs. Martin’s son is waiting at the back of the house.”

“Right; and now, Phœbe, you remember what I told you.”

“Yes, ma’am, I am to tell Doctor Crankey not to sit up for you, and to ask Mr. Owen to wait if you are not come in.”

“And you are to leave the house on no account, Phœbe.”

“Indeed, ma’am, I am not tempted to put my foot outside the door. The strange man I told you of has been hanging about the place the whole day long. I don’t like his looks, ma’am.”

“I thought he wore his hat so that you could not see his face.”

“That is just it, ma’am; why does he hide it?”

“Because he does not want it to be seen,”

gaily answered Grace; "and now, Phœbe, take the lamp, and wait here."

Phœbe obeyed; Miss Lee ran upstairs. In a few minutes she came back; she wore a long dark cloak; its hood, drawn over her head, concealed her face.

"La! ma'am," said Phœbe admiringly, "no one would know you now."

"That is right. Mind what I told you; good-night."

She vanished in the dark passage. Phœbe locked and bolted the door. The lamp in her hand, she went over the whole house, carefully she shut every window. As she closed the last in her own room up stairs, she caught sight of a dark figure walking in the road below. The night was black and wild; the loud wind drowned every sound; the spot always lonely now seemed doubly so. Mrs. Martin and her family were out; Phœbe was quite alone. She was not timid, yet involuntary fear crept over her; she hastily

closed the window, then sat down on the edge of her bed, starting at every sound.

The whole evening Phœbe sat alone, a prey to strange apprehensions; her presentiments were not like those of her mistress gay, but gloomy. Ill luck had made her turn to an old newspaper for amusement; it related a story of burglary and murder, that made Phœbe's very blood run cold. At ten there came a knock at the door below. Phœbe cautiously opened the window; even through the gloom of the starless night she recognised Doctor Crankey; but, for more security, she asked who was there. His cross voice replied, by bidding her make haste and open, and not keep him standing in the night air. "Thank heaven!" fervently thought Phœbe, "I am truly glad the old gentleman is come:" and she ran down and opened to him with unusual alacrity. As she let him in, she gave him Miss Lee's message. Without seeming to heed her, he entered the parlour, and

sat down. Phœbe asked what he would have for supper.

“Nothing,” he briefly replied ; and impatiently he waived her away.

Phœbe closed the door, and left him. She sat working in the next room for two hours and more, when a low knock at the door startled her. Reflection soon told her that it was either Mr. Owen or Miss Lee. She went and opened ; a man of middle-sized stature stood before her.

“Who are you ? what do you want ?” cried Phœbe, attempting to close the door in his face ; but he quickly thrust in his arm.

“Phœbe,—Miss Hanwell,” he said beseechingly.

Phœbe trembled from head to foot. She knew the voice, though long unheard ; and she remained powerless and mute. It was Tom, Mrs. Jones’s son ;—Tom, whose dearly prized letters, tied with the pink ribbon, Mrs. Rashleigh had thrown into the fire ;—Tom, come back from

America; and, spite all Phœbe's lightness and folly, come back to her with the longing of true love.

Phœbe felt it. She had flirted with Mr. Rashleigh; she had tried to win Mr. Owen; yet in heart she had never cared for any but Mrs. Jones's son. She hid her face in her hands, and burst into tears. And then there followed an explanation, not in the passage exactly, but in a little back room; and much was made clear on both sides, and much, too, was forgiven.

CHAPTER VI.



THE meeting was densely crowded. Public attention was then all eager about the natives of the Ma-ba-mi Islands. They were so primitive, so interesting, and so ill used. Mr. Marson the celebrated Philanthropist, was to be in the chair. Walters, the celebrated Walters, and Lord W——, genius and aristocracy, were to be heard that night. About Mr. John Owen some knew, but they were few, and said nothing: his name figured not in the programme.

The hall was vast and high; the gas-lights burned bright; from his raised seat the chairman looked down on a sea of waving heads. He was a good man, but meetings were his hobby;

with delight he heard the vague murmur around him. This was the two hundred and thirty-fifth meeting at which he presided, and every one had had a philanthropic object. He could take the chair about anything, and for anything; his life might be said to be spent in the chair. His favourite sentiment was: "Sir, public meetings are the life of this country, the support of our national institutions. Sir, take away our public meetings, and you take away everything, sir." Mr. Marson had great experience of public meetings: no man in Great Britain knew better when to open and when to close a meeting; how to manage a public, where or how to wield a hammer. In the latter art he was eminent, and justly celebrated. When praised on the subject, Mr. Marson modestly replied: "Habit, sir, all habit; mere habit, a mere knack, sir." And if the pun were not noticed, Mr. Marson took care to remind the listener that between knack and knock there was just the difference of a vowel;

for Mr. Marson was as accomplished a punster as he was an accomplished chairman; and it was a matter of dispute amongst his friends in which art he most excelled,—in pun-making or in chair-taking.

And now he had opened the meeting, and the speeches had begun. The speakers were numerous; now and then they gave one another sharp hits, but there were cheers for all. The natives of the Ma-ba-mi Islands were methodically turned over and examined under every aspect. But at length something or other went wrong. Mr. —— had said something which irritated Mr. —— . There arose a violent storm. Little knew the natives, in their wild island home, as they sat or slept in the shade of the palm or the cocoa nut, or played amidst the waves of the shining blue sea,—little knew they of the tempest which their rights and their wrongs had raised in —— Hall, —— Street. In vain the chairman used his hammer. Mr. So-and-So made a statement,

by which Mr. Such-a-One, at the other end of the hall, held himself insulted : the place was in an uproar. Lord W—— tried to quell the tumult. At first, his feeble voice was no more heeded than the wailing of a child by the wild sea waves. When at length he could put in a few words of his carefully learned speech, it sounded, as it was, inopportune and impertinent. He had meant it for a calm, decorous audience ; it suited ill an angry and agitated crowd. Lord W—— was received with impatience, and ceased, dismayed.

Mr. Owen seized on the moment ; he knew the spirit of public meetings well. How often had he as an obscure reporter been in such scenes—how often had he with impatience and weariness recorded dull, monotonous speeches, and vainly felt rising to his lips the few, brief terse sentences that should have been uttered,—how often in a tumult as loud as this had he vainly felt stirred within him the spirit that should rule the hour ?

But now his hour was come. He forgot Lord W——, puny foe, crushed without him, he forgot all he had meant to say, the sharp, pungent sarcasm now useless, and worse than useless. In words, half of flattery, half of command, he compelled silence, not without opposition; but as little did he fear as heed it. Ardent and resolute he plunged deep into that wild strife, which from the days of the Forum down to those of the Parliament, has been the passion and the life of political men. As he feared none, so he spared none: he prevailed and was heard.

He spoke! O eloquence, magic power, gift of early nations and impassioned races now fast dying away in these days of cold worn-out civilisation, the noblest of man's gifts, for you rule men's hearts, you had come down to him with the free ardent blood of his people, you were with him then. It was a hollow meeting got up for show, for party purposes; it was a hollow audience come there to hear set sayings and applaud set

things ; of the meeting he made a reality, a living truth, of the audience a crowd still as death.

When he ceased there rose a murmur, then came cheering, prolonged and deep. His friends surrounded him ; well they might, the night was won. Again Lord W——, with the persistency of an unuttered speech, attempted to obtain a hearing, but even his warmest adherents compelled him to silence.

Little do you, or need you, care, reader to go deep into the business of that meeting, it has been forgotten years ; the natives of the Ma-ba-mi Islands have been converted and civilised since then ; they have ceased to interest public sympathy. Even John Owen's speech, which was discussed at every political breakfast-table the next morning, that famous speech which opened his political career, is now dead and forgotten. The curtain has long gone down on that part of the world's tragi-comedy, and for that scene, as for many a proud drama, it shall rise no more.

The meeting was over, and at length Mr. Owen tore himself away from congratulations and shakes of hands. The crowd still poured out as he hastily entered the cab waiting for him outside. The cabman knew where he was to drive and what he was to get for quick driving.

Before this Mr. Owen had tasted the sweetness of success; he now drank deep of the more dangerous cup of popularity. The whole scene still rose before him; he saw, he heard it all again; the tumult conquered, the deathlike stillness, the cheering and applause. In vain he impatiently threw the cab-door open and let in the cool night-breeze, his brow could not cease to burn, his blood to flow with fever heat. The horses went at a wild gallop, London was already left behind; along the dark road he caught glimpses of houses and trees vanishing like lightning; a little more he would be with Grace: a joy more stormy than that of the night's triumph awoke in his heart.

Miss Lee's house was reached. Mr. Owen did not give the cabman time to knock ; he leaped down and hastily ran up the steps ; the open door yielded to his hand ; he crossed the passage ; he knocked at the parlour door but received no reply ; in no mood to brook even a second's delay, he opened it at once.

Doctor Crankey sat by the table, his arms folded on his breast, his head bent : he was alone. On hearing the door open, he looked up slowly, but said nothing. Mr. Owen said "Good-night," and Doctor Crankey in a low unmoved tone mechanically replied "Good-night."

Mr. Owen sat down, chafed at the old man's presence. Then he rose and walked restlessly up and down the room ; once or twice he paused, thinking he heard the light step of Grace on the staircase ; but Grace came not. At length he began to grow impatient.

"Is Miss Lee gone up to her room?" he asked half indignantly.

“Grace is out,” replied Doctor Crankey.

Mr. Owen remained transfixed.

“Out!” he said hastily, “’tis impossible, Doctor Crankey, you mistake.” “She dare not,” he muttered between his set teeth, and his brow flushed up at the thought, “she dare not thus make a jest of me;” and he said again aloud, “I dare say Miss Lee is upstairs—I can wait, there is plenty of time.”

He sat down as he spoke, but his eyes remained on the door. Doctor Crankey resumed:

“Grace is out. Our cousin Amy came for her, Grace did not want to go; but it was long, very long since she had seen Amy, and she was persuaded.”

Mr. Owen was deeply offended. Little he knew that the cousin Amy had for years been sleeping in her grave. He was indeed offended. Was this the anxious vigil, the proud and happy meeting his imagination had painted? of which the mere thought had troubled his very heart and

haunted him like a fever ! Yet he bade his rising anger be silent ; Grace was giving him another cruel proof of her careless indifference ; still, she might not mean to wound or insult him ; she had been persuaded out, then delayed beyond her intention ; it was hard, it was pitiless of her to treat him so, but he would wait for her return, and his revenge would be a double share of fondness.

He waited, what seemed to him, an eternity, and yet she came not, she came not though the night wore on, though the lulled wind gave place to rushing rain. A sudden terror entered his heart ; could anything have happened to her ? He started up as pale as death.

“ Where—with whom is she ? ” he cried, turning on Doctor Crankey, “ old man, what are you dreaming of ? Something must have happened to Grace.”

“ Ay, ay, old man ! ” echoed Doctor Crankey, with a bitter laugh ; “ throw my age in my face ;

do. And what should have happened to Grace? Is she not with Amy!"

"Then why does she not come back?" asked Owen, stamping his foot with impatience. "What took her, what keeps her out at this hour of the night?"

"Her pleasure, sir, which waited not your bidding," austerey replied Doctor Crankey. "You seem to be waiting for her—wait no more—Grace will not return to-night."

There was a pause; at length Owen spoke:

"I do not believe it," he said slowly and deliberately; "she dare not use me so. I do not believe it."

"And do you dare to tell me, sir, a priest of God, that my lips have told a lie?" cried Doctor Crankey, turning round, and raising, as he spoke, the lamp that shed its full light on his gray locks and wrinkled face. "Again I say, sir, that Grace will not come back to-night—believe it or not, what care I?"

And, turning away, he put down the lamp. Mr. Owen said not a word. There passed a strange storm in his heart; then as strange a stillness followed; he did not open his lips; he turned on his heel, and left the house as he had entered it. As he stood on the threshold he paused, and vowed never again to cross it; he vowed it, not in indignation or wrath, but in deliberate calmness, as a vow he meant to keep. Then he entered the cab, which at once drove away.

When the bow is most bent it must be relaxed, or it will break; when passion has reached its highest point, it must be contented or it must die. In that hour John Owen felt his love die in his heart. Fond as a lover, but imperious as a man, he had come, flushed with pride and success, to lay his triumph at the feet of Grace. He had come resolved that the day which shone on ambition should also dawn upon love; determined to bid her, once for all, accept or reject

him, yet to blend so much passion and devotion in his imperiousness, that mortal woman could not resist him. "This time," he thought, "she shall see and know that 'tis not a secret marriage, 'tis not a woman won by fraud, shall content me. She shall be my wife in the face of all, and by her own consent. I will spare nothing; prayers, entreaties; her pride, if proud she be, shall be gratified to fulness, but she must yield—this must cease—no more shall a few kind words lull or pacify me. This very evening she shall pledge herself to me, or see me for the last time. She shall become a part of my being, or be torn from it as a thorn that has stung me too long. I will allow her to be my rest and blessing, but no more my torment."

Thus resolved to win and subdue her, in a mood antagonistic though fond, John Owen had come to see Grace Lee. And she was out, regardless of her promise; out with an idle friend, on some idle pleasure. Thus she cared

to know how he had fared; thus she had sat up, waiting for his return; this was the fond welcome; these were the caresses she had promised the victor. The more he loved her, the more he felt the insult; the greater was his passion, the keener and the deeper was his anger; he had been humble as a slave; the injured pride of man now rose within him. His love knew no agony, but perished of a death as sudden as its birth.

As John Owen drove home that night, he seemed to waken calm and cured, after the fever of eighteen months. He looked back on the last two years with the incredulous wonder of a sane man on the long delirium of madness. And had he so long, he, a proud, cynical man of the world, had he so long made himself the fond slave of a woman? He laughed at the folly, and feeling within himself a strange calmness, a sense of repose long unknown, he breathed freely; he triumphed in his liberty.

Phœbe was again alone ; her lover was gone ; they had exchanged forgiveness and fond vows, and Phœbe was happy ; yet uneasiness came to her. Why did not Miss Lee return ? It was late, it was raining hard, it was surely time for her to come back. At length Phœbe heard a knock at the back door ; she ran and opened ; it was Grace alone, and with drenched garments.

“ ’Tis nothing,” she said, gaily. “ I lost Martin, or Martin lost me in the crowd, and I could not find a cab ; I got wet : but it is nothing. Has Mr. Owen been waiting long ? ”

“ Mr. Owen is not come, ma’am.”

“ Not come ! Did you leave the house, Phœbe ? ”

“ No, ma’am ; not a second. I gave your message to Doctor Crankey, but he has remained in the parlour ever since.”

“ He could not get away ! ” thought Grace. “ I saw how they all crowded around him ; but he will soon be here.”

She went up to her room to change her wet clothes; she shook her hair down her shoulders, and went down with a light heart to the parlour. Doctor Crankey sat by the table, as Owen had left him, in a dream. He never looked round as she entered. She took a stool, sat down at his feet, and laid her head on his knee.

“I know you are angry,” she said in a low tone. “I know I should have told you; I did not think to be out so late. Doctor Crankey, I went to a great meeting—a public meeting. I went to hear Mr. Owen speak, for I had never heard him. I was not alone; Mrs. Martin’s son came with me. I stood one amongst hundreds—hidden, unknown, unseen, unheeded. At first it was a mean, then it became a grand sight—Hush! that is his knock—no, it is nothing!—When the meeting opened, who thought of him? when it closed, who thought of any other? He made himself their master; he stood amongst them all like a general in a battle. There were

moments when my heart stood still, and my breath seemed gone ; but he knows not fear, and with a smile he conquered. They cheered him long and loud—all ; friend and foe united to proclaim him victor of the night."

She raised her head, and shaking back her flowing hair, smiled up proudly in the old man's face ; but the smile died away as she saw it dull and vacant, as she heard him say—

"And Amy, child ! what did you do with Amy ?"

Grace rose. She laid her hand on the priest's shoulder.

"Doctor Crankey," she said, "you are not well."

He passed his hand across his brow.

"There is a strange mist here," he replied ; "thoughts come to me, but they will not stay ; they pass like clouds across the sky. You were telling me something—I know it, for I heard you ; but I have already forgotten it—it is gone.

Bear with me, child ! I can think but of things that pierce my very heart."

" Doctor Crankey, what has happened ? Tell me, pray tell me."

" I have been to the oculist's to-day," he slowly replied, "and I have heard my sentence. In a few weeks Doctor Crankey will have looked his last on God's beautiful world. Sun, moon, stars, earth, and sky, will he see no more. Ah ! when I was in Rome, and sang High Mass in churches of marble ; when I preached to the learned and the great, I little knew how soon this world's pomps would close on me. Farewell to the priest and his little human pride ! farewell to the books I shall read no more ! farewell to the ' History of the Church ' I shall never finish ! farewell to Doctor Crankey and all his learning ! You may fold up the snow-white surplice you worked, and the crimson vestment you embroidered. Doctor Crankey's last mass is said and sung, my girl."

He bowed his head; tears flowed down his wrinkled cheek: Grace laid her head on his shoulder; her heart was very full, she could not speak.

“It is not all,” he said again. “When you were rich I was foolish: I ventured my little hoard and I lost it. Enough remained to me, I thought, until my work should be finished; but sparing though I have been, all that is gone—and here am I in my old age, thrown a useless burden on a poor girl like you.”

“Oh, would that were all!” exclaimed Grace from the depths of her heart, “would that were all! Hear me, Doctor Crankey. You know that Mr. Owen loves me: well”—she added, and her voice involuntarily sank, and a flush the old man could not see, rose to her cheek—“well I, too, like him. We are to marry: you shall live with us. Hear me out. Cannot I be to you what Milton’s daughters were to their father,—ah! more than Milton’s daughters. The

speech their lips uttered said nothing to their ear : to read to the blind poet was to them a joyless task, as joyless to them as mine to me will be delightful ; for what glorious thought—what immortal page that Grace reads to you will she not enjoy doubly. Thanks to you, I know Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Doctor Crankey, we shall read together, write together, and work together. You shall be no burden ; do you think I cannot be jealous of your dignity and pride ? I tell you that your learning shall find its weight's worth in gold. You shall finish the ' History of the Church ; ' you shall write a new lexicon ;—the world shall hear of Doctor Crankey yet."

She spoke almost gaily. The old priest turned to her ; a half smile was on his lips ; his dimmed eyes were full of tears ; he stretched out his two hands, and laying them both on her head, he blessed her fervently. Aye, fervent was the blessing ; nor was it unheard, though not ful-

filled as hoped and wished the human weakness of him who gave it.

She had persuaded Doctor Crankey to go up to his room, and she sat alone. She waited for John Owen; often she opened the window and looked and listened long: the rain had ceased; the night was still; and yet he came not. She sat up until day dawned, and still he did not come. He came not—and was to come no more.

CHAPTER VII.



SUCCESS is the parent of success. On the day that followed the meeting, Mr. Owen went down to W——. The tide was with him. To conquer Lord W—— was not much, but to supplant the patriotic and enlightened Lord Mayor was rather more difficult. Mr. Owen owed much to personal tact and daring; he owed more to Doctor Marsh, whom he dazzled and seduced, and who in his native borough was a powerful man; but most he owed to what Cicero we believe held the crowning virtue of a great general: Good Fortune.

At the end of two weeks, Mr. Owen came back to London, duly returned member for the

enlightened borough of W——. In that little town of gossip and scandal, where, as a boy, he had been jeered at, insulted and looked down upon as a man, where his ambition had been made a laughing-stock, Mr. Owen had seen himself the object of popular curiosity and homage. The electors of W—— had given him a dinner; the ladies of W—— had presented him with an address. Truly, as he had said himself with scarcely disguised irony, his cup of this world's honours was full. He sneered at his success, yet he enjoyed it; not wiser in this than many a wiser man.

When Mrs. Skelton opened the door to Mr. Owen, she dropped him a deep curtsey, and wished him joy. Scamp too came bounding up to his master, and laid his rough head on the knee of the new member of parliament. As Mr. Owen gave him a careless caress, his eye caught sight of the dog's collar; it still bore, engraved, the name of her who had once been

his mistress. Such had been Mr. Owen's wish ; but now he frowned, and said, impatiently,—
“ Mrs. Skelton, buy Scamp a new collar, and have my name and address put upon it, if you please.”

“ Yes, sir, certainly ; and what will you have sir ? ”

“ Nothing. Any new letters ? ”

“ No, sir, I sent them on as you bade me.”

“ Right. Any message, any news ? ”

“ The old lady up stairs is very ill, sir.”

“ What old lady,—not Miss Blount, surely ? ”

“ Yes, sir. She's had a paralytic attack, and is not expected to live.”

“ Pshaw, woman,” he cried, starting up, “ why did you not say so at once ? ”

He threw the door open, bounded up stairs, and in a moment was at Miss Blount's door. Jane opened—he entered hastily the room where Mrs. Gerald sat alone. On hearing him she turned round ; her eyes were red with weeping.

"Ah! thank God," she exclaimed, "you are come."

He sat down by her.

"How is Miss Blount?" he asked.

"Dying."

"Dying! Why did you not write to me?"

"I wrote last night. She was taken ill yesterday."

"Can I see her?"

"Not yet. I want to speak to you, Mr. Owen. I want you to speak to Miss Blount; you alone can bring her to a sense of right and justice. I am her nearest relative,—we are of the same blood,—we bear the same name. Why did she bring me here if not to make me, or my child, her heir?"

"Be quite easy, Mrs. Gerald, that is all right."

"All right—all right—when she leaves every penny to that disgraced and disgraceful fellow, my worshipful cousin, Rashleigh Rashleigh."

Mr. Owen was thunderstruck. Rashleigh, his

enemy; the man whom he had shamed and dishonoured, was Miss Blount's heir! He had brought things to a fair and promising issue, that Rashleigh Rashleigh might reap the fruit of his toil. If Mr. Hanley had been turned from a friend to an enemy, if the existence of the Walton Company had been endangered, it was that Rashleigh might be enriched. His newly-worn political honours were not so dear to Mr. Owen as his professional pride; and the idea of being thus baffled and trifled with, stung him to the very quick.

"And is it possible!" he exclaimed, "that Miss Blount disinherits you for the sake of that scoundrel?"

"Oh, she does not exactly disinherit me," cried Lily, with a scornful laugh; "but not thinking me wise enough to manage alone, she insists that I shall marry Mr. Rashleigh Rashleigh. In that case she will leave little Grace a handsome portion, and will die happy at having blended two

family interests. Bless you it has all been settled this whole week. Mr. Rashleigh kindly consents—Mrs. Rashleigh graciously approves—and I was consulted this morning.”

“And so,” thought Owen, with an internal sneer, “I lose all; the suit and the woman. And is Rashleigh Rashleigh, mean wretch, to have that beautiful creature, and with her a splendid fortune?—And of course you consent?” he said aloud, with some bitterness.

“I consent!” cried Lily, indignantly; “I marry the man, who, when I was poor Lily Blount, gave me an admiration which he never meant to end in marriage! No, Mr. Owen, I will die in a workhouse,—I will see my child a beggar before I marry that man!”

The flush on her cheek, the angry light of her dark blue eyes, rendered her doubly beautiful. She looked handsome—very handsome; and cold indeed is he whom beauty cannot move. Mr. Owen gazed at her, then folded his arms, and

cast down his eyes. Ambition, the pride and vanity of man, the desire of triumph, the will to humble his old foe by bearing off from him a prize so fair and so splendid, the sense too that she was a beautiful thing to win and possess, stimulated and quickened his blood. Again he looked at her. "Mrs. Lee," he said, "I am going to be very frank."

"Then do not say so," replied Lily, half-smiling, "or I shall think you want to deceive me."

"You cannot think so; my words shall bear their own witness. Besides how can I deceive you? You know me long enough, and well enough too. Some weeks ago Miss Blount did me the honour she now designs for Mr. Rashleigh; I declined it,—I need not tell you why,—all that is over. If I now seek that which I could not then accept,—shall I prove more fortunate than Mr. Rashleigh?"

"You!" cried Lily, "you!—and Grace!"

Mr. Owen betrayed no emotion.

“All that is over,” he said coldly. “I have freed Miss Lee of a passion that must have sadly wearied her patience. To speak more frankly, I have ceased to love one whose love I never could win. And to say the whole truth I am not sorry.”

“And Grace?” again asked Lily, looking at him.

“Well,” he replied, impatiently, “what about her, Mrs. Gerald? She liked me, I know it; but with a liking that never did and never could satisfy me. And surely you do not think I have the impertinent presumption to believe myself an object of regret to Miss Lee?”

Lily said nothing; but she thought: “Poor Grace! I knew it would end so.”

“Mrs. Lee,” resumed Mr. Owen, “time is passing, and you give me no reply. This is brief wooing—I know it—but remember that death will not wait our leisure. On this hour’s resolve

your whole future may depend—your future, and that of your child.”

Lily looked at him.

“Mr. Owen,” she said, half laughingly, half wistfully, “I like you a great deal better than that odious Rashleigh,—but—but I am rather afraid of you.”

“Afraid !” echoed Owen, surprised.

“Promise,” continued Lily, coaxingly ; “promise not to be too strict with me.”

“No,” he replied, rather shortly ; “you must trust me, Mrs. Gerald—if you cannot, have nothing to do with me.”

Lily hesitated, and looked at him furtively. He sat by her, a dark, forbidding man, yet there was nothing unkind or ungenerous in his face. With one of those sudden impulses, which, with her sincerity, were the only redeeming traits of her faithless nature, Lily threw her arms around his neck, exclaiming :

“Be kind to me, Mr. Owen, be kind.”

Mr. Owen was fairly taken by surprise ; yet he was touched too.

“ Kind ! ” he echoed, biting his lips to repress a smile, “ what do you take me for ? ”

And he pushed her back a little, but only the better to look in the beautiful face so near his. Lily laughed, and drew away, reddening. Mr. Owen rose, and took her arm within his.

“ Now,” he said, “ take me to Miss Blount. I will speak to her in your presence.”

Lily obeyed, and led him to the sick woman’s room. She lay in her bed with closed eyes ; on hearing them enter, she looked up ; she was pale as death, and seemed almost as inanimate ; yet she smiled, and held out her hand to Mr. Owen.

“ And so you are elected ? ” she said, faintly ; “ Right, John Owen, right.”

He sat down on the edge of her bed, and looked at her. He had been deliberately offering marriage to a woman on the chance of Miss Blount’s death, but for that death he did not

wish; he liked her in his way; he owed much to her, he knew it; and when he saw her pale and faint, and dying, he was sincerely sorry.

“Well, Mr. Owen,” she resumed, fixing on him her brown eyes, which brightened as she spoke, “the Walton Company will triumph now, I guess. Never mind—the spirit that was left to me, I leave to others. This is but one act of the play, and ’tis not the last. I have settled everything; I give all to Lily. I give Lily to the other heir——”

“And why not to me?” interrupted Owen, in a direct way that often did him good service.

Miss Blount raised herself on one elbow.

“To you,” she said; “to you, John Owen?”

“Yes, to me; why not?”

Miss Blount looked like one wakening from a dream. She seemed bewildered.

“But you refused twice,” she said, “twice.”

“But I may accept now,” he replied.

“But Lily may object!”

“Lily has consented—have you not, Mrs. Gerald?”

Miss Blount looked from one to the other; then her head sank back on her pillow, and turning her face to the wall, she said, in a low, wailing voice :

“There is not one that is true to his own heart. There is not one.”

Mr. Owen frowned, and rising, walked up and down the room. After a while, Miss Blount looked round again :

“I was not pledged to Rashleigh,” she said, “unless Lily would have him : she prefers you, and she does well. Be it as you both please ; if you are content, so am I.”

And thus it was settled, and in one hour Rashleigh Rashleigh lost both bride and inheritance.

Miss Blount wanted to make it an express condition of her will, that Mrs. Gerald Lee should marry Mr. Owen. He refused.

“Do not trust her,” said Miss Blount, “she will break her faith with you for the first titled fool who makes her an offer. I know she longs to be a lady.”

“For a king, she dare not,” replied Mr. Owen, smiling securely. And, thanks to him, Mrs. Gerald Lee remained free.

And now nearer and nearer drew Miss Blount's last hour. She would have no one near her, save John Owen. He sat by her, her hand in his, and he heard the last outpourings of a proud and not ungenerous, though too worldly heart.

“John,” she said, “you are as faithless as any of your sex, yet I like you. May you live years, and every year rise higher; may you be proud and prosperous long after old Miss Blount is in her grave. I am glad you take Lily, and with her the task of my long-nursed revenge. I am glad you have left that dark girl about whom you were so mad—nothing but sorrow

could she have brought you, John. You loved her too much, and much love is ill-fated."

"Why so?" he asked, struck with the words.

He received no reply; a sudden change had come on her face; he saw she was dying. He called in none; he obeyed her last wish: "Let no eyes save yours look on my agony." And no other eyes beheld it. As she had lived, so she died: a proud and solitary woman.

CHAPTER VIII.



GRACE waited the whole night long; she waited the whole of the next day; still Mr. Owen came not. Then she called Phœbe, and, laying her hand on the girl's arm, she said very earnestly: "Phœbe, are you certain that Mr. Owen cannot have come last night without your knowledge?"

Phœbe hesitated, then she told Miss Lee all about Tom Jones; at the close she added: "But if Mr. Owen did come, ma'am, surely Doctor Crankey must know it."

Grace said nothing; she put down her work, and went up to Doctor Crankey's room. The old man sat reading; he hastily closed the book on

seeing her, and observed deprecatingly : " Do not scold, child ; I may as well wear out my eyes to the last."

" Doctor Crankey," said Grace, " when did you last see Mr. Owen ? "

" Mr. Owen—John Owen—it is a long time ago ; is it not ? "

" Try and remember, Doctor Crankey."

He sat long vainly musing ; at length he said : " Was it not on the evening when you went out with Amy ? "

" Perhaps it was : what did Mr. Owen say ? "

Doctor Crankey mused again, then he replied : " I wish, child, I could remember ; but I cannot ; it seemed to me that he was rather vexed." He looked wistfully in her face ; Grace smiled, and took up his book.

" Where did you leave off ? " she asked ; " let me read to you awhile."

" Third paragraph, right-hand page."

Grace sat down and read aloud, but as she read

she thought : " He came whilst I was out ; he is angry, and now he will be another week without coming. A week ! Who knows, ten days, perhaps. Ah, John, John Owen ! where is the use of all this ? Do you not know that you must end by returning ? "

Some perish by mistrust ; through too much faith Grace suffered. She would have smiled if any had told her that she was no longer loved—she would have laughed at the thought of being forsaken. Yet time wore on, and Mr. Owen came not.

" He is very angry," thought Grace, " very angry. I did not think he could be so angry with me." And still she waited, and she had not a doubt, not a suspicion, not a fear.

At length she knew all ; not slowly, not gradually, not from one step to another, prepared by the last pang for the next, until came the crowning agony. Providence knew that she was strong to suffer and endure, and

sent her the full measure of her woe in one moment.

Doctor Crankey had gone to bed ; Grace sat up alone working by the low fireside. The wind whistled loud and deep. Grace leaned her brow upon her hand ; her work dropped on her lap ; she listened long. "What, if he were to come to night," she thought. Her heart beat ; her cheeks flushed bright and warm. "Oh, I would not scold," she thought again ; "I would not chide—not a word, not a murmur, shall he hear from Grace. He will sit there, as he often does, gloomy, dissatisfied, silent. I, too, will say nothing : but I will sit down by him. I will pass my two arms around his neck ; unasked, I will give him the three kisses I promised him that night, and surely when a proud woman does that, a proud man may forgive."

The sound of the opening door broke on her dream ; she looked round with sudden joy—it was only Phœbe with a newspaper in her hand.

“Would Miss Lee like to look at it. Mrs. Martin’s son had just brought it.”

“Thank you ; leave it to me,” said Grace.

Phoebe laid it down on the table, and left her. Grace took it up, and looked idly over its closely printed pages. Yet the whole world’s story was there. The times were troubled ; Grace read of the flight of sovereigns ; of rebellious cities triumphing in their strength ; of weak provinces pitilessly crushed ; of a war hanging over the whole political world, like a dark cloud on the horizon. Then came the domestic tragedy, famine, murder, misery, crime, vice, and over all, like the mocking of so much woe, fashionable news of balls, concerts, and dinners, and *soirées*, of intended marriages, of elopements, and divorces. At length Grace fell on the following paragraph :—

“Yesterday closed the great Blount case, in the triumph, as our readers already know, of that old English family over the Walton Company.

The masterly manner in which the counsel for the plaintiff exposed and summed up a long series of iniquities, will ever be remembered in the annals of the English bar, as an almost unique display of terse and manly eloquence. We need not remind our readers that Mr. John Owen was lately returned member for W——. We are authorised to state that the intended union between Mrs. Gerald Lee, relict of the late Gerald Lee, Esq., and sole heiress of the late Miss Blount's large property, and John Owen, M.P., is unavoidably deferred until the fifteenth of next month."

Grace put the paper down. What passed in her heart then? God alone knew. It survived that hour. The weak heart breaks, and dies, and feels no more; the strong heart lives to bleed on, and suffer for ever.

Who has passed through life and not been wrecked with some long cherished hope, on the wild and desolate shore of that troubled sea?

Some sit down among the rocks, raise their voices, and weakly weep. Some look around them and say: "Of the home to which fate has driven me, I will make my home; grief, I fear thee not; I take possession of this thy barren heritage; here I cast my tent; do thy worst; I brave thee in thine own doleful realm." And some neither brave, nor are conquered by grief. They know that life is a hard battle; that few are the victors; they take evil as they take good fortune; defeat and death as they take victory—with a smile. But happy they who conquer; thrice happy they who never know what that smile of the lips costs the aching heart.

The whole of that long night Grace sat up; the book of her life was finished: a short, bright story closing in darkness. She read it again—all that woman can have, she had had, all that woman can lose she had lost. Within her twenty-six years she had comprised the bitter experience of a life-time. She was learned, and

learning she had soon found was but a means, not an end. She had travelled and seen much, and though she could not weary of beauty, she had learned to see it in the lowliest and nearest things, as well as in the grandest and most remote. She had mixed with the world, tasted all its pleasures, seen it under all its changes, and left it without weariness, satisfied to have learned from it that lesson of indulgence which is rarely learned in solitude. Then love had come to her, late guest fondly welcomed. He had hidden in her heart, filled it with hopes and dreams, then abruptly fled, leaving her the thirst, the want of being loved unknown before, and which are a hapless passion's keenest torment. And it was well that it should be so. To teach us a few such lessons was life given ; to lead us from one dearly bought knowledge to another, until we learn that last and happiest lesson—the final death.

Final, for there is more than one. We die daily ; we die to childhood, youth, human life,

and human faith, to art, to song, to beauty and to love ; to the mortal part of eternal things ; to others, and to ourselves—to all, save God.

When day dawned, dull and dim, through the window of the wide lonely room, Grace rose, and thought : “ Providence, that gave all and took all, I bless thee—for thou hast ceased to strike ; and you, my past life, farewell ! We are quits now ; I owe you nothing—I owe you not your pleasures and your joys ; they were sweet and deep, but I have purchased them all—ay, every one. Farewell.”

Several weeks had elapsed when Miss Lee, one morning, called Phœbe up in her room. She gave her a letter, and told her to take it to Mrs. Gerald Lee. Phœbe, too, had read the newspaper paragraph ; burning with indignant grief, she exclaimed : “ Oh, ma’am ! I cannot bear it, I cannot. I never liked Mrs. Gerald Lee. I never did. She was a great deal too fond of some one’s company ; many’s the hour they have spent

talking and laughing together whilst you were out, ma'am ; but I know nothing of a gentleman's temper, if Mrs. Gerald Lee will be the happy wife she fancies——"

Grace interrupted her, smiling.

"The newspaper spoke idly, Phœbe. Mrs. Gerald will never be Mr. Owen's wife. And now, do not tell me that you dislike Mrs. Gerald ; this letter concerns you, and as you love me, Phœbe, I enjoin you to obey it."

With tears Phœbe promised. Miss Lee resumed : "This little packet, Phœbe, I wish you to give to Mr. Owen ; give it with your own hand into his. Ay, though a third person were by, who would say, 'I will hand it over for you ;' heed it not, but do as I bid you. Do it, Phœbe, as you hope to be happy some day with the man you love."

"As I live, ma'am, I will obey you. Shall I go with it at once?"

"There is no hurry," replied Grace, with a

smile; "give that packet, give it to him to whom it is destined, when you can—in a day, in ten days, in a few weeks—it matters little. Time is mine now, and has ceased to be the thing beyond price, the treasure gold could not purchase it once was."

Phœbe took the packet. Miss Lee gave her her hand, Phœbe kissed it again and again, for she felt, and truly, that this was a parting. At length Grace said: "Go now, Phœbe. God bless you. May you be happy some day with Tom Jones."

The evenings were cold and chill; by the fireside sat Doctor Crankey sadly musing. A hand laid on his shoulder roused him; but he did not look up; he now was totally blind.

"Doctor Crankey," said the voice of Grace, "rise, and go with me. We are going—"

"Going, child," he exclaimed, startled, "where?"

Grace did not answer, but she said again :
“ We are going ; we must leave this place.”

He rose, too much troubled to put further questions.

“ And my books ? ” he said wistfully ; “ books,” he added with a deep sigh, “ and what have I, a blind old man, to do with books ? ”

He took her arm. Grace looked around her. She had left the home of her youth, the home of her riches, the home of her solitude, and now she was leaving the home of her poverty. She left it with all its records untouched—unchanged. With the fire still smouldering on the hearth, with the lamp left to burn out unextinguished.

The night was dark and starless ; they walked along the lonely road, then through streets and alleys, until at length they vanished, absorbed in the gloom of the great city, like two silent shadows in the depths of Time.

CHAPTER IX.



WITH all the eagerness and the vehemence of his nature Mr. Owen plunged deep into the excitements of his new life. He spared no one, not even himself, and strong though he was, he paid the penalty.

Two days after the close of the great Blount case, he was seized with a violent fever that nearly killed him. But his hour was not come, and though he remained ill some weeks and was delirious part of the time, he finally recovered. The visions of his sickness all led him back into the past; sometimes they were vague and dim; often too they had the distinctness of truth, but always they brought back the image

once so dear to his heart. Wherever his thoughts wandered, to Wales amongst mountains stern and wild, to Eden with its bowers of roses, or back again to his own sick-room, still Grace was there. And one night he saw her thus, no dream, but living and real. She stood by him unchanged in aspect or attire. He stretched out his hand and took hers; he recognised its very touch; she looked at him and smiled, and for a moment he was conscious of the present, then again his thoughts wandered into the past.

“Grace,” he said, “I have made a good speech to-night, and you know what you promised me.”

He looked up eagerly into her face; he saw a warm flush gather over it, a light more melting fill her dark eyes, then she stooped. He felt her breath on his face, her cool lips on his parched with fever. She kissed him three times, each time more fondly than the

last. His head swam and the vision vanished in darkness. It was the last. With restored health Mr. Owen returned to the present; its indifference, its feelings, and its wishes. Once more the epoch of his marriage, delayed by his illness, was fixed.

Mrs. Gerald Lee's first act after the death of Miss Blount was to go into the lightest and most elegant mourning, then to take a handsome house in the West End and furnish it luxuriously; after which she resumed her broken acquaintances and friendships, and indulged in as much gaiety and pleasure as she possibly could at that rather dull season of the year.

Mr. Owen did not interfere with her movements or her actions. He had a world to do and to think of; he could devote but a limited portion of his time to his fair betrothed. At first Lily liked this—it left her all the more free—then her *amour propre* was piqued at his

coolness, and she set herself to charm Mr. Owen. She was young, beautiful, more than beautiful, seductive; he was anything but a cool, unimpassioned man—she succeeded.

It was not that he loved her, or that he had grown blind to her faults and imperfections; the time had been too when beautiful as she was, her beauty would have availed her little with him; but his long passion for one woman though now dead and cold, had rendered him less indifferent to other women. And like all passions too, it had opened the once firmly closed barriers of his heart to weaker and less worthy feelings.

He saw that she was lovely, at first with a cold eye, then not quite so carelessly. Lily made very free with Mr. Owen on the plea half-feigned, half real, "that as they did not care about one another it did not matter." And Mr. Owen, at first because he did not care, and later because he did care for this

pretty familiarity, did not repel her. She was beautiful as a woman and frolicsome as a child, and half as woman, half as child, Mr. Owen liked her. When he came to her tired, ill-tempered, full of bitter thoughts, Lily laughed and talked him into a better humour; then when spite of himself he smiled, Lily laying her pretty head on his shoulder, smoothing his hair and stroking his cheek, would look in his face with mocking triumph. If he drew her more closely to his side, if stooping he kissed her beautiful cheek, Lily only laughed and said: "Why, Mr. Owen, one would think you care about me." And she did not pretend to perceive that daily he stayed longer with her, that daily his looks became more kind, his caresses more fond. He had many faults, but he was not heartless; he could not help, apart from her beauty, caring somewhat for this handsome young creature, who laid herself out so entirely to please and amuse him; who was supple as a

glove to his will, for now and then Mr. Owen quietly informed Mrs. Gerald Lee that he objected to her doing this, or expected her to do that, and was always obeyed without demur; yet who never wearied him with a tame and servile submission, and preserved in her bondage all the lightness and the grace of liberty.

And thus matters were going on and the wedding-day was drawing nearer, when one morning Mrs. Gerald's maid came in with a letter; the bearer, a young girl, waited below for a reply. Lily turned pale on recognising the handwriting of Grace. With a hesitating hand she broke the seal and read:

"LILY, I know you love me—I have learned too that you are rich and free—for a last time oblige me. I send you this by Phœbe—take her to attend on you or on little Grace. She is to marry shortly a young man whom she has long loved—I wish her in the meanwhile

to have a safe home—with me she can no longer remain; alone I do not want her to be; I know you will do this for my sake: Good-bye, Lily, God bless you and little Grace.

“GRACE LEE.”

When Lily had read this brief letter, that began with: “I know you love me,” that held not a reproach, not an allusion, and closed with a blessing, she hid her face in her hands and wept bitterly. At length she looked up: her first words were:

“If Mr. Owen calls—say I am not at home; and now tell the girl who brought this letter to come up.”

The wondering maid obeyed. In a few minutes Phœbe was come and gone. With a flutter of pride she had heard the office to which she was promoted: “Nursery-governess to Miss Grace,” and though she had never liked Mrs. Gerald Lee, she could not on hearing

too the amount of her wages, help dropping her new mistress a grateful curtsy. Of Miss Lee neither breathed a syllable.

Grace had too long ruled a proud and rebellious heart not to possess that attribute of all great natures: power. Fallen, forsaken and betrayed, she yet preserved that something Royal which God gives to a few, and which Fortune cannot humble. The pride of others never could be her pride. She could not be jealous of Lily, she could not be angry with her; for they were not equals. Generous to the end she wrote to ask a favour, well knowing that for her to solicit was in reality and truth to confer a last and priceless boon.

For a few days Lily was deeply affected; but at length she recovered the emotion of mingled remorse and shame into which the letter of Grace had thrown her.

“After all,” she thought, “it is no fault of mine—she tried him too much—he no longer

loves her—I am innocent of all this—Grace cannot and does not blame me. She says she knows I love her, and she is in the right, I love her as much as ever; but it would be awkward to meet just now. Grace knows that too.”

And thus Mrs. Gerald Lee lulled her conscience to sleep; never a very hard task.

We have said that Lily had tried to charm Mr. Owen, and that she had succeeded. At first she felt very proud of having conquered the bear, but she soon found that bears are awkward people to deal with. Mr. Owen discovered that his betrothed went out too much; he restricted somewhat the long list of her acquaintances; he thought it needless that she should dress and look lovely for any save him; he hastened the epoch of their marriage, and in the meanwhile he came often and stayed longer, coolly claiming all the fondness and familiarity of a future husband.

Lily began to feel uneasy. She remembered

the strange things Grace had once said of Mr. Owen, and Lily had no fancy for the fate of Semele. Her word alone bound her, yet for the wide world the light and faithless Lily would not have dared to jilt Mr. Owen: a singular fascination, something wide of love, she herself could not define, kept her true to her exacting lover.

She came in late one evening from a large party to which she had gone without his knowledge; half-past one was striking as she entered the drawing-room. Mr. Owen was waiting for her. On seeing him Lily paused hesitatingly: had he waited to welcome or to reprimand her.

“Come in, child,” he said half smiling, “you are not afraid—are you?”

He made room for her on the sofa. Lily went and sat by him half reluctantly. He gave her a long and earnest look. She was dressed in rich white silk with splendour and with taste; she sparkled with jewels; yet there was no excess; her bare arms and shoulders were half veiled in

white lace ; she wore rosy flowers on her bosom, and rosy flowers in her hair, and she looked beautiful as blushing dawn.

“You are but a faithless thing,” he said smiling, “but because you look so handsome to-night—I will say nothing.”

“I had not promised to stay within, Mr. Owen.”

“No, but you had given me to understand you would. Pshaw, child, do not think I am angry ! Why who could be angry with a butterfly like you !”

Lily reddened and bit her lip.

“I saw Mr. Hanley,” she said, “he came up, and asked me if I really meant to marry that bird of prey ?”

Mr. Owen laughed, and stretching himself on the sofa, he carelessly laid his head on Lily’s silken lap.

“Mr. Owen !” exclaimed Lily, “get up, or I shall be very angry.”

“Angry, Lily ! was I ever angry when you so

often came and laid your head on my shoulder. You cannot say I was—ungrateful girl!”

Lily asked with tears if he meant to insult her. Mr. Owen heaved a deep sigh; then in a wholly different voice, he said:

“Lily, be a good girl! I am eaten up with bitter thoughts to-night—help them to pass away—speak not if you like, but let me stay thus a while.”

Lily said nothing; it was not the first time he spoke thus, seeming to seek in her caresses peace and content. And now he passed her bare arms around his neck, and raised them to his fevered lips. Lily bent over him and smiled.

“Mr. Owen,” she said, “confess you are thinking of Grace?”

He raised his head, then it sank back; he seemed surprised, more surprised than annoyed or displeased.

“Pshaw!” he said a little impatiently, “what

could make you think of that? Think of her! —That is all dead and gone. Say something, Lily. Is your trousseau finished? Can we soon get married?"

"Not a day before three weeks!" hastily replied Lily.

"Three weeks! you mean one."

"Impossible!"

"Never say that to me, Lily. It irritates me. Come, 'tis settled for next week; I leave you the day. Do not provoke me, or I shall do like the Sybil, grow more exacting, and pass from three weeks to three days."

He was sitting up by her now, and he spoke quite seriously. Lily wanted to resist; he overruled her; she submitted, but not without tears. Half fondly, half impatiently, he soothed her, and at length Lily weeping, yet smiling, laid her head on his shoulder, and patting his cheek upbraided him "for being so cruel to her."

Mr. Owen looked at his watch, and thought it

time to go; but Lily coaxingly said "not yet;" he yielded half gloomily. She saw that the dark mood was on him still; she did her best to dispel it with soft words and softer smiles. He smiled at her efforts, and suddenly drawing her to his side, he said :

"Lily, I exact nothing; but do you really wish to do a thing that shall please me? Yes; well then forget that trashy trousseau, and become my wife at once: say after to-morrow."

"After to-morrow!" cried Lily, startled, "why so?"

"I want to see," he replied with some bitterness, "if that, if anything will do me good."

"Do you feel ill again?" exclaimed Lily half alarmed, "is your fever come back?"

"Ill! ay sick to death; fear not child, this fever is not taking. And now say yes, Lily, say yes and content me."

She looked up into his face; it bent over her dark and passionate; yet she knew that its pas-

sion was not kindled there for her—for no woman. It was born of his own unquiet heart, of that restless something within him, which but one being ever had been able to still or appease.

She knew it, and yet a fascination she could not resist, the power which ardent tempers exercise on natures more feeble bent her to his will. To all he wished she said yes, and if beauty in all its bloom, if caresses charming because so free, and yet not too free, could banish bitter thoughts, his need not remain behind. And his brow cleared gradually, he pressed his young and beautiful mistress to his heart, he kissed her hair, and her brow, and with more passion, with more fondness, he rose to leave her.

“Come to-morrow morning,” said Lily.

“And after to-morrow too,” he replied smiling.

“I do not know,” she answered, “how you made me consent; but the fact is, Mr. Owen, that when you want to have your way, you always do have it. And now good-night and good-

morning; for it is shamefully late; but come early to-morrow morning."

She told him to go; yet her arm lingered locked within his; they parted slowly like fond and happy lovers.

"I wonder whether I am in love!" thought Lily, when he was gone. "I know not; but I like him much—very much; I like him as I never liked Gerald; as I never liked any one. And he, too, likes me. Ay! proud and haughty as you are, John Owen, I saw your cheek flush; I felt your hand tremble to-night!"

And the young beauty looked at herself in the large mirror opposite her, triumphing in the consciousness of all conquering charms.

Mrs. Gerald Lee's maid was lighting down Mr. Owen, when her mistress, forgetting that she was thus engaged, rang above. At once Phœbe came out from the parlour and said hastily:

"I shall open the door, Mrs. Marshall; that is Mrs. Lee's bell."

Mr. Owen knew that Phœbe was with Lily ; how or why she had come, he had not been told ; and had not asked. He never looked at or spoke to her. She reminded him of a time he wished to bury in the silent past. He came often to the house, yet he saw but little of her, for Phœbe was always with her young pupil ; and Mrs. Gerald Lee was a fashionable mother.

Phœbe opened the street door, then looked carefully around her, lowered her voice and said :

“ May I speak to you, sir ? ”

“ Certainly. What is it ? ”

“ Miss Lee, sir ; Miss Grace Lee told me to put this with my own hand into yours.”

He smiled as he took the packet. The words bore but one meaning to his ear ; some child-like gift from little Grace.

“ Thank Miss Lee for me,” he said.

“ I do not know if I shall ever see Miss Lee again,” replied Phœbe, in a low tone.

He had not heard her ; he was gone.

CHAPTER X.



HE sat in his study ; his brow upon his hand.

“She is young, and she is lovely,” he said to his own thoughts ; “she is light and faithless, but I can mould her to my will. Besides, what matter—I shall take her to some solitary place, where none shall vex or intrude ; and I will see if youth in all its freshness—if beauty in all its bloom, and both possessed in security and peace, can soothe this unquiet fever, this discontent of all things, which, like an old foe ever on the watch, has come more tormenting in my prosperous days than it ever was in my adversity.”

And again he thought of Lily ; he thought

of her fair and dazzling, as he had seen her when he laid his head on her lap; of her beautiful face, laid so caressingly near his; of all the endearments and the smiles with which she had for the time soothed his restless heart. The thought gave him nothing—no pleasure—no emotion; it left him cold and passionless.

“Why is it so?” he drearily wondered, searching in his own heart for the cause of human emotions. “Why can she seduce me when she is by; yet be so powerless in her absence? Is it so with me alone, or is it thus with all the men who devote their lives to the worship of beautiful women? Is that why pleasure dies so soon, and satiety comes so quickly? And yet they weary not, they pass on from one to another, ever seeking that beauty more perfect than the last, that shall enchant them. Strange task and strange life for a man’s ambition and pride! Well, I at least need not look beyond Lily. I have seen the handsome

Margaret Livermere, and the beautiful Mrs. Chesterfield; Lily is more lovely than either or than both; if she cannot charm away discontent, I need seek no further; at once I may say, Beauty, thou hast no power over me: farewell!"

He raised his brow from his hand; a small sealed packet on the table caught his eye; it was that which Phœbe had given him; he stretched out his arm; he took it; he carelessly broke the seal: a folded paper and a morocco case fell out. He opened the case somewhat curiously and saw a portrait, he drew the light nearer, looked and dropped the image as if it burned his hand. With some emotion he rose and walked up and down the room.

"I did not know," he thought, "I could be subject to so strange a delusion! I must have been working too hard, or is the fever coming on again?" He wiped his moist brow, and returning to the table, he took up the portrait. Again it showed him a dark-haired and dark-eyed

woman, whose face he knew but too well. And this time, delusion or not, he yielded to it. For days, for weeks he had forbidden his thoughts that image; he had hidden it with the memory of Grace in the gloomiest and farthest recesses of his heart; and he had vowed—solemnly vowed—that so long as he lived, he would not indulge in one, or willingly look on the other. And now with ardent eyes and trembling lips, he looked as one can look at a beloved image, and never can look at a beloved object. For the first time his eyes could possess that face, to him once so sweet and so seducing, and on it they now fed as the famished after a long fast.

Three months before he had set a firm seal on the past. Like the victorious Archangel with the Evil One, he had crushed Passion under his heel, and looked down at her prostrate, with a conqueror's triumph and scorn; and now in a few seconds—in a moment—his victory was turned into defeat; his triumph became mockery

and shame. Passion woke up, not calmed and subdued by habit, but unquiet and eager as in the first days. Suddenly he remembered the words of Phœbe, and the folded paper that had fallen out from the packet; he looked for it eagerly; with a trembling hand he opened it, with eager eyes he read:

“JOHN, I promised you my portrait once: I send it to you now. I have coaxed it from Doctor Crankey for your sake.

“John, what ails you? You are silent; you are gloomy. Sometimes when I sit and look at you, I know not whether to laugh or cry.

“Ah! John, are you blind? Why, I love you with the whole might and strength of my heart. I love you, John, as much as you love me—I know it is not less; I know, too, it cannot be more. I have been loved before to-day, but never as by you. Gerald Lee liked me very much, I know he did; James Crankey

was fond of me ; but a fair face charmed away one, and slander daunted the other. The daring and the strong alone can love faithfully and well. When God seemed to take all, He gave me all. He made me poor as a beggar, and rich as a queen. He took from me the sway of a whole gay world, but He gave me back more than He took, in the empire of one proud heart.

“Forgive me this boasting. You can be proud of your genius, of your successes, of your fame ; your love for me is the solitary boast of my life.

“And yet, John, I will not speak with false or feigned humility ; I know I am worthy of you. I have not your gifts and your power, but I am your equal. We are of one kind—of one nature. I can look into your face and not feel abashed. I can be clasped to your heart and not think : ‘I am too weak and mean a creature for that home.’ Rise as high as you like, John, Grace can follow. Sink as low as Fate can bid you sink, she will no more be

dismayed than you. Ay, indeed we are of one kind and of one nature; two parts of the same being, never to be divided. You are the fire, and I am the flame. Without you, I am nought; but remember, John, that though without me you may live and burn, you are dark and yield no light! I fear this must read very proud: forgive one, who can do nothing humbly, not even love. Forgive me, too, if I have so long tried you: if I had loved you less should I have needed—if you had loved me less, should I have dared? But I knew I was weak; I knew, too, that your love—warm and ardent as life—was strong as death. I knew, John, that Grace might do anything, and still be beloved. Happy and blessed knowledge that made more easy the task, else too hard, of endless denial.

“I wish we were married; I wish I were your wife. I do not know half enough what you think or do. You do not ask my opinion and my advice—and you once did, Mr. Owen. There

seems to be something that vexes your very heart, and you do not tell it to me. I wish we were married—you too wish it—let it be soon and quickly. Take me nowhere. I know that toil is your rest, and that the Garden of Paradise would not please me so well as to sit by you at your work in those dark, dull London rooms where you live. You are a man not a boy: I am a woman not a child. Love shall do us instead of green fields—work on our marriage day; and when your task is done let Grace, your wife, be your pleasure and your rest. They who feel that their love will soon grow cool, do surely well to devote all its first season to passion and fondness. But you, John, must love me more the second day than the first. I will be dearer to my husband because he has me, than because he wishes for me.

“Ah, John, do you think me mad; or do you see that if I write so, it is all through much love? I write, too, as I feel beyond Time. We

are both young yet ; aye, thank God, we both are young, and youth makes love doubly sweet ; and yet I write to you as fearlessly as if grave years and white hair were with us both. Shame be to her who says she loves, and yet mistrusts. Love is all faith, or it is nought : and shame be to him whose poor passion can be stimulated by stinted gifts and half confessions. Love is changeless, or it is but dust. I gave you nothing till I could give you all, as I do now ; and I would scorn to think your love could grow cold because I have no more to give.

“ Come to-night, John, and take what I have written, but could not tell, and when you have read it, come again to-morrow.

“ You are come, John, and now you lie sleeping, and I sit writing—you little know to whom. You are come rather tired and a good deal out of temper. When you are married, Mr. Owen, your poor wife shall have to coax you into a better humour : happy if you will let her. For-

give me if I jest while you seem to suffer, but I feel so happy—perhaps because I have written to you ; perhaps because you are come ; and perhaps again, because, little as you suspect it, I shall hear you speak to-night. Oh ! speak well, John—speak well, if you love me. I have put forth my whole heart in your life and in its triumphs, and I feel like the poor merchant that has but one precious venture on the broad sea of Time. And now farewell : I have written too much. Farewell for three hours—for half a night—brief parting that yet seems too long.

GRACE LEE.”

Mr. Owen put down that letter so full of pride and passion. The letter of a proud yet fond woman, too proud for a half confession of her fondness. It bore a date three months gone. He knew well enough when it was written—on the evening of his great speech, when he lay on the sofa looking at Grace, who thought him

asleep, when he saw her raise it to her lips and hide it in her bosom. He knew all this; but his mind remained inert and dull; his thoughts were silent, and for once spoke not to their master: the deepest grief his life had known swept over him like a dreary flood in that hour; he let it come and conquer—that proud hard heart was humbled to the very dust.

For hours he remained thus: at length night yielded to day; he woke; he roused himself from his torpor; he put away the letter of Grace—he did not read it again, there was no need;—every word of love, of trust, of fondness, had in the first reading, inflicted its full sting, and exhausted its power to wound. Nor did he look at the portrait—gift of Love sent by the hand of Nemesis. He took his hat and left the house.

He took a road his steps knew well; it brought him to the solitary dwelling he had so long loved, then forsaken. It was a wintry morning, wet and chill; the unpaved road was

filled with pools of water; they mirrored the old wall on which the moss hung wet, and dripping; the leafless trees rose above the ancient house, on a gray sky where cloud after cloud passed, slowly travelling to the west. Through the damp grass he walked to the mouldering door. He knocked; it was long ere he got an answer: at length Mrs. Martin came. On seeing him her face lit. She smiled.

“Well, I am so glad,” she said. “You bring news of Miss Lee, sir, surely. Well I always hoped we should hear of the lady. Do walk in sir. You can tell her it is all as she left. I have not touched or disturbed a thing. I hope you will tell her, sir.”

Mr. Owen showed no signs of surprise; this was no more than he expected. He walked in: Mrs. Martin opened the door that had once been that of Grace: he stood in the room where he had seen her writing to him a tardy confession, that came, alas! too late. He sat down.

“Well, sir,” appealingly said Mrs. Martin, “I think it is all as the lady left it.”

He looked around him. Ay, it was all unchanged. These were the dull and gloomy rooms which Grace had filled with light; where he had seen her wear in her poverty a mien as gay and as free as in her sunniest days.

“How long has Miss Lee been gone?” he asked abruptly. Then, seeing Mrs. Martin’s look of surprise, he added: “I know nothing of Miss Lee,—I came here to seek her.”

Mrs. Martin looked incredulous; and though at length convinced, she could tell him little or nothing.

“I saw Miss Lee that morning, sir; she looked and spoke just as usual. I saw her again in the afternoon; in the evening she and the old gentleman were gone: that was exactly five weeks ago; and more than that, sir, I do not know, and cannot tell.”

It was useless to question her further. Mr.

Owen rose and left. "I must see Phœbe," he thought. And as if to meet his wish, Mrs. Skelton's first words when he entered his own home were :

"The young woman, Phœbe Hanwell, sir, is come, and asks to speak to you."

He hastily entered the dining-room, where Phœbe sat waiting. From the door he fixed his keen eyes on her face, eager to read there by whom she had been sent. Her first words destroyed the involuntary hope.

"If you please, sir," said Phœbe rising, and speaking in a quick, excited tone, "I am come to you, sir, because I am leaving Mrs. Gerald Lee, and I hope you will tell Miss Lee it was no fault of mine. Mrs. Gerald once tried to slander me with Miss Lee about you, sir, and I know she will try to do it again, about that packet. I care very little about what she may say ; but I should not like Mr. Jones to hear a false tale of me, nor Miss Lee, either, sir."

"Where is Miss Lee?" asked Owen.

Phœbe gave him a surprised look, that said :
"What, do you not know?"

"Where is Miss Lee?" he repeated impatiently.

"I do not know, sir," Phœbe replied gravely.
"I left Miss Lee in the old house by the Prince's Road five weeks ago. I have never seen her since then."

"A second time she has fled from me," thought John Owen; "but once, alas! it was in love, and now it is in anger."

"Phœbe," he said aloud, after a long pause, "tell me all you know since I ceased to visit Miss Lee." He sat down to hear the recital.
"Tell me," he added, "how she looked, how she seemed, what she said, and when and how she gave you the packet you gave me last night."

"Well, sir," replied Phœbe, "it will not be a long story, I noticed nothing particular in Miss Lee, save that once she questioned me very much

to know if you had not come on an evening when she was out. It was some time after, that she read in the newspaper that you were going to marry Mrs. Gerald Lee ; but still there was nothing particular about her. She worked all the day, and every evening she read for hours to Doctor Crankey. One thing, however, I noticed, for it seemed strange." Here Phœbe paused, hesitatingly.

" Well," said Mr. Owen, looking up.

" Well, sir, Miss Lee went out every morning before daylight ; for though I never saw her go out, I did see her come in three times, just as I was getting up. She, too, saw me, yet said nothing, so I did not dare to hint that she went out very early. Well, sir, that was all ; save that poor Doctor Crankey lost his sight, and went groping about the house. I do not think, too, his mind was quite right ; he talked so oddly. Miss Lee, however, still kept up her spirits, and indeed, sir, she was the same as

ever; for one day there came a poor Welsh woman to see her,—Widow Jackson she was, for I knew her in Wales,—and the same evening I noticed that one of Miss Lee's rings was gone; and I knew, as well as if I had seen it, that she had given it to her to sell. It was on the day after this, that Miss Lee called me up in her room, and gave me a letter for Mrs. Gerald Lee, and a packet for you, sir. And she bade me, sir, she solemnly bade me, put it with my own hand into yours; but when I asked, 'When?' 'There is no hurry,' replied Miss Lee; 'time is mine now, and has ceased to be the thing beyond price, the treasure gold could not purchase, it once was.' With this, sir, I left her, and since that day I have never seen my dear mistress."

"And that is all you know," said Mr. Owen.

"It is all, sir."

He leaned his brow upon his hand, and spoke no more. At length Phœbe rose.

"I hope, sir," she said, "that when you see Miss Lee, you will tell her it was not my fault if I left Mrs. Gerald Lee; but though I told her the whole truth about that packet,—which, it seems, Mrs. Marshall saw me give to you,—she pretended not to believe. So I left at once. My cousin Ann will receive me; and if she does not, I don't care; all I care is, that Miss Lee should know the truth, sir."

"Very well," he replied, composedly; "when I see her, I shall tell her; if you see her first, Phœbe, let me know: you can stay here with Mrs. Skelton, if you like."

Phœbe reddened, and thanked him, and said something about Mr. Jones, and thought she had better not.

"Please yourself: remember what I told you."

"Yes, sir. Good morning, sir."

"Good morning." He raised his head as he uttered the words; he spoke with his usual calmness; his face showed no emotion, but it

was pale as death. Whatever secret resentment Phoebe felt against him, melted away; she saw that Grace was already avenged.

When she was gone, Mr. Owen rang, and summoned Mrs. Skelton. She came with an air of offended dignity, suggested by Phoebe's recent visit. But this Mr. Owen little heeded.

"Mrs. Skelton," he said, fixing on her his piercing look, "who sat up at night with me when I had the fever?"

"Sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Skelton, startled.

"You heard me—answer—was it Miss Lee?"

"It was Miss Lee, sir."

"You never told me so before. Had she forbidden you?"

"No, sir, she had not. 'If Mr. Owen asks you,' she said, 'tell him; if he does not, say nothing.' You did not ask, sir, and I did not say, as the lady bade me."

"Mrs. Skelton, tell me all you know—say it slowly, and forget nothing."

“Indeed, sir,” answered Mrs. Skelton, looking flurried, “there is nothing to tell. You had been ill three days, when as ten struck, I heard a knock at the door. Law! says I, only think, there’s the Doctor at this time of the night. So I went and opened, and behold you, sir, if it was not Miss Lee. Law, ma’am, says I—”

“How did she look?” interrupted Owen.

“Very pale, sir; law, ma’am, says I, and she breaking in upon me just as you did now, sir, says at once: ‘Mrs. Skelton, how is he?’ ‘He has a fever, ma’am,’ says I,’ and of course fevers are bad things; but the Doctor says, that with his constitution there is no fear.’ With that her colour came back a little. ‘You are sure the Doctor says so,’ says she. ‘Sure as I am alive, ma’am. Would you like to see Mr. Owen, ma’am?’ ‘No,’ she replied with rather a curious smile, ‘thank you.’ ‘Law, ma’am,’ says I, ‘the poor soul would never know

you, he's as unconscious as a baby—at all events, ma'am I wish you would come in.' So she did, and sat down in the dining-room. Then all at once she got up to go, as I thought, but not a bit of it. 'Mrs. Skelton,' she said, 'Mr. Owen and I are not such good friends now as we once have been, but he watched by me many a night when I was ill; it is my turn this time.' Well, sir, I was struck all of a heap to hear Miss Lee, that had been so great and so rich a lady, speak so. I did my best to talk her out of it; but she would not mind me. I saw her heart was in it, and I said—" Here Mrs. Skelton hesitated.

"What did you say?" asked Mr. Owen.

"Perhaps you will not like it, sir."

"Do not mind that; speak without fear."

"Well, sir, I said: 'Ah! ma'am, I always thought you would marry Mr. Owen.'"

"And what did Miss Lee say to that?"

"Nothing, sir, but she smiled. So I went

on and said: 'I little thought it would be that Mrs. Gerald Lee.' I beg your pardon, sir, but these were my very words. With that, sir, Miss Lee turned back her head, and said quickly: 'Mrs. Gerald Lee will never be Mr. Owen's wife.'"

"She said that!" exclaimed Owen, unable to repress a start.

"Yes, sir, and like one who knew and was certain."

"What else did she say?"

"Nothing, sir. I showed her into your room, and she sat up with you all that night. Towards five in the morning she left, and at ten the next evening she came again, and so it went on for a week; but on the last night you were getting better, sir, I fancy you said or did something that showed you knew her, for she said to me: 'Good-bye, Mrs. Skelton, I shall come no more; Mr. Owen will soon be well again.'"

•

“And that was all.”

“All, sir ; but I said again, I am sure I do not know how, that I supposed you and Mrs. Gerald Lee would soon get married ; and Miss Lee answered in the same quick way as before : ‘ No, he will never marry Mrs. Gerald Lee.’ ”

“And that was all,” again said Mr. Owen.

“All indeed, sir.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Skelton, you may leave me.”

When she was gone, he looked at his watch, went down stairs, took a cab, and drove to Mrs. Gerald Lee’s house.

He found her in an elegant morning dress, taking her cup of chocolate like any belle of the last age. She had but just risen, and looked very fresh and very lovely. On seeing him enter, pale and grave, a mischievous smile played round her mouth. He sat down without speaking ; Mrs. Gerald Lee sipped her chocolate with much coolness.

"You know all," he said at length.

"What all?" asked Lily, with feigned surprise.

"You know all," he said again. "If I could atone for the wrong I am inflicting on you, I would, but you know yourself atonement is impossible. What I can do, I will do. I think I know you well enough, Mrs. Gerald Lee, to say that you would rather reject than be rejected. Say that you had agreed to marry me, but that you did not think me worth the honour; I shall never contradict the statement."

"Thank you," ironically replied Lily.

"You lose nothing; you gain much. You are young, beautiful, you are ten times richer than I am, you can become a duchess if you like."

"Thank you," again said Lily.

"You speak ironically, Mrs. Gerald, yet remember that you owe me two good things."

"And pray what are they?"

"Wealth and liberty. But for me you would be poor, or the wife of Rashleigh Rashleigh."

"That's very true," frankly answered Mrs. Lee, "and as it so chances that I can lose you, Mr. Owen, and not break my heart, I am truly obliged to you for your past kindness. But as I naturally take an interest in the fate of a gentleman I was to have married to-morrow, I trust you will let me know how you are faring. Grace has written to you, I hear, explained all, and brought you back to her feet. Pray let me know when the wedding is to be. I think, Mr. Owen, I have a right to know *that*."

Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes sparkled with anger.

"You are angry," he said, "not without cause, I confess it. Have your revenge. Grace has sent me a letter, and with it her portrait—but not in love. She has fled from me, and fled this time, I feel it, not to be found so soon."

Lily rose and looked triumphant.

"I knew it," she said, "I knew it; it is just like her to send you her portrait. Find her!

No, Mr. Owen, seek until your dying day, you will never find Grace Lee. I knew she loved you, I always did; but if I agreed to marry you, it was because I felt she was too great and too good for you. Seek not for her, it is useless; Grace must ever go from one step to another. She will become a Sister of Charity, a Carmelite nun, but never your wife."

Mr. Owen looked unmoved with the taunt. He rose and said calmly.

"May you be very happy with another man, Mrs. Gerald Lee."

"And may you never be happy with Grace!" cried Lily, losing her temper at his coolness, "And now," she added ironically, "now that we have exchanged mutual good wishes, I think we may part, Mr. Owen."

He left her; this was the parting, this the adieu of two who were to have taken together the journey of life. Within the following fortnight, Lily had become the wife of Lord Stuart,

a Scotch nobleman, doubly ancient : in descent and in years.

Mr. Owen, once more a free man, returned to his home. He took out the letter of Grace, he read it again ; he looked long at her portrait, then raised it to his lips. “ If she sent this letter and this image in anger,” he thought, “ it was in love that she watched by me, in love, that yielding to my prayer, she granted me caresses too tender and too fond for hate. Oh, Grace, you may fly, you may hide ; your lover shall find you yet.” And he could not take his eyes from that loved image ; and gazing on it, he could not think Grace for ever lost. We are born with hope in our hearts : a gleam of light shone on the close of this dark day : Grace loved him, and what is to love, but to forgive for ever !

CHAPTER XI.



BUT Providence is often severe with her children. To some she seems to forgive all. To John Owen and Grace Lee she appeared to forgive nothing. She chastised them both, by granting them what both had sought for—separation.

Vain, this time, proved Mr. Owen's search. It was ardent and keen; it was long, and persevering, but it was fruitless. Grace seemed to have melted away, and vanished, like a vision. No sign, no token of her could Mr. Owen find. He sought for her in England, in France, in Italy; in poor homes; within convent walls; in far lands, and still he found her not.

Yet men envied him, and well they might : he rose high ; he became wealthy ; he was the head of a strong party in Parliament ; a distant relative died, and left him thirty thousand pounds. With seeming calmness Mr. Owen heard the announcement, but when he was alone he gave way to passionate sorrow : Power, Fame, Wealth, were showered upon him, but Grace, Grace Lee, where was she ? But love feeds on hope, and to hope Mr. Owen added voluntary illusions and dreams. Eden was again to be sold ; at once he outbid every competitor ; “ Grace would like it.” He left the garden unchanged ; but he altered the house, so as to make it resemble as much as possible her house in Wales. He ransacked his memory to remember details his temper did not lead him to observe. He searched over all London for Phœbe, and, more fortunate than in his other search, he succeeded. Phœbe was happily married to Tom ; she gave all the aid and information in her power,

and Eden at length completed, only waited for its future mistress. But this wished-for guest came not. Again Mr. Owen sought for her, again he poured forth money like water, and squandered gold like dust in the search, and again he was baffled.

And it seemed as if every token of her should be effaced from his life. Mrs. Skelton retired on a pension to the country; Phœbe and her husband went to America. But there yet remained one link with Grace and the past: it was taken. Scamp had long been weak and ailing; his disease was old age. One day he lay down at his master's feet, licked his hand, and died. What remained to John Owen now? A portrait that never left him, a lock of dark hair, and that garden where he had seen her one happy day; where the roses still yearly bloomed, but not for her. Wasted was all their fragrance and their beauty on this careless master.

Could he but have forgotten he might yet have been content; but he remembered; he remembered

all he had not thought of in the first fervour of passion. He remembered that Grace was generous and good, a noble, an accomplished woman, one who could be a man's dear mistress, his faithful wife, his tried friend ; his delightful companion. She was merry, and she was witty ; she was open, warm, and free as sunshine ; and in his lover's memory she was not without a sort of beauty, and all this was lost and gone, and the last years of his youth faded into manhood, and they remained arid as a desert and joyless as a sunless sky. He had won all the world can give, and not the gift of enjoying what he had won. When men praised him, and opened their ranks before him with servile obeisance, he drearily wondered through what insults and contumely Grace now followed her lonely path in life. When an ample board spread before him, there came with it the tormenting thought, " had she her daily bread ? " When he sat by a warm and burning hearth he asked himself if perchance a

fire cheered the hearth by which he had left her to sit alone. When at night his head sank on his pillow, he thought with a passionate pang that she whom he would have gathered to his bosom, and sheltered there from every ill of life, might now be an outcast and a wanderer, without even a roof to shelter her bare head.

From such thoughts as these he woke, moody, sullen, but eager to plunge into his fierce pastime of hunting down men. The less amiable side of his profession was that which attracted him most. He liked its strife; a strife of words, yet keener than that of steel; he liked its power over the minds and destinies of others; a fierce pastime, but not ignoble. For to some it is strange, yet true, that their fellow-creatures seem appointed as a prey; such was Mr. Owen's instinct, and he could no more help himself than the lion or the eagle.

As a surgeon he had battled against death and waged ceaseless war with disease; a soldier, he

would have braved and pursued his foe unto death: barren sands, mountain passes, seas should not have barred his path, fastnesses or caverns hidden his enemy from his wrath. A priest he would have pierced the sinner's very heart with dread and woe, and cast him a prostrate victim ready for the sacrifice of a contrite heart before the altar of his God. But in nothing would Mr. Owen have been a calm or a gentle man. The milk of human kindness had not been given him in abundant flow, and for what he had not received the great Judge of all men would not call him to account.

But with all that, Mr. Owen was a very brilliant man of the world, one who acted his part in all its scenes, and was sought for and welcomed eagerly and none guessed or knew the secret canker he carried in his heart.

Well, it is hard to suffer, and memory can be the keenest of torments; Mr. Owen turned desperate. He plunged deep into dissipation, and

did his best to forget. He used his privilege as a man and viewed life under all its aspects. With avidity he sought for every society that could charm away memory, and thus he obtained an introduction—and it was not easy—to Mdlle. Aurelie, famous as an actress for her beauty and her acting, and still more famous for her errors as a woman.

She lived in a luxurious home which a Duchess might have envied, ever surrounded by a crowd of adorers. “She will charm and surprise you,” said his friend who took him to her house, “and you will see her to advantage too, for there will be but a few besides ourselves.”

Surprised Mr. Owen was, and disappointed. He had often seen Aurelie on the stage; he had as a critic, been one of the first to praise her acting, bold, but somewhat free, and Mdlle. Aurelie in her own house proved to be a rather plain Frenchwoman, sallow, thin, not in the least pretty, and, strangest contrast of all, quiet and

modest as a school-girl. There was nothing striking, nothing brilliant about her, nothing but French ease, tact and grace. She spoke little, and that little in a soft, low voice, most unlike her stage voice, loud and clear. She had provided a delicate supper for her guests, but all she touched herself was a biscuit and some water. Choice cigars were handed amongst her invites, but she declined even the most lady-like of cigarettes. "I never smoke," she said with a smile. Then she sat down and played and sang with more taste than skill, some French and Italian airs.

"Is she not a delightful creature?" enthusiastically exclaimed his friend as they left.

"So delightful," replied Mr. Owen, yawning, "that lest I should lose all peace of mind, I shall go no more near her."

But when he was alone he could not help moralising on the strange infatuation of men. "There is a woman," he thought, "who is posi-

tively plain, who is withered in her youth; who has nothing but her notoriety to recommend her, and yet beautiful wives have been forsaken, and fortunes have been lavished, and duels have been fought for her sake. Oh! men—men—ye are bold and original in nothing—not even in your vices.”

He thought to see no more of Mdlle. Aurelie, but a perfumed little French note came to him one morning, and, gently reproaching him for his absence, requested the pleasure of his society that same evening. A sneer rose to Mr. Owen's lips. He was like most men, very hard to a poor fallen woman; he saw nothing in this invitation but a trap rather too visibly laid, yet not feeling much in peril from Mdlle. Aurelie, and feeling, too, rather wearied of his own company, he went. He found her alone; simple and natural, as on the first evening. After some general conversation, Mdlle. Aurelie, looking at him very fixedly said, “Monsieur Owen, I remember you very well. It

is now some years ago, yet I remember you—you were a critic then—you wrote for the newspapers. I often saw you at Saint James's—you wrote once an article about me—no one minded me then. My engagement was all but out; I knew it was not to be renewed; ruin and beggary were my future. The little talent I had seemed to forsake me. I was all but hissed one evening—that article fell into my hands; I read it and took courage; that same night I acted in a new part; I felt myself that I acted well. I was applauded and recalled twice; it was my first and my sweetest triumph. I owed it to you, Monsieur Owen. This was what I wanted to tell you this evening. I see you now and then at St. James's; you applaud me little, yet I feel and know that I give you pleasure; I am glad of it, for you do not look a happy man. I am to act to-night in one of my best parts, at least so the world says; come and see me; I will do my best; and then come back and sup with me: will you?"

Mr. Owen accepted readily. He was curious to contrast the quiet little woman before him with the brilliant actress, and Aurelie too, whose destiny he had unconsciously influenced, so subdued, so unassuming, began to interest him.

The season was at its height ; Saint James's was full. Mr. Owen sat in the centre of the dress circle facing the stage. Aurelie had not deceived him—she acted that night in one of her best parts : the character of a half wild girl, wronged and vindictive, and she acted it with a sadness and a levity that bordered on the tragic. It was fine acting, very fine, and Aurelie looked as she always looked on the stage, a grand and beautiful creature. Mr. Owen sat leaning forward with his eyes fastened on her, intent and absorbed, yet not so much so as not to overhear some whispered conversations around him. On the first appearance of Aurelie two ladies, by whom he sat, leaned back in their seats with virtuous disgust.

“I have a great mind to go, now that horrid creature is coming,” said one.

The other one wondered what people saw in her, and what the Lord Chamberlain was about; but thought it better to stay for the after-piece. Some gentlemen behind, though more indulgent to the actress, were as severe to the woman; unconscious of who was listening, they added much that made Mr. Owen smile.

The play was over, and he sat again with the quiet Frenchwoman in her elegant home. She listened with pleasure to the praise he gave her acting, and with attention to his criticisms. Their quiet supper over, he rose to leave her. She pressed him to come again.

“With pleasure,” he replied, “but I must warn you of the consequences. I heard this evening that I had supped with you every evening of the last two weeks; that I had bought you a new carriage, and was going to present

you to-morrow with a magnificent necklace of emeralds."

"So soon?" said Aurelie, with a resigned smile. "Well, Monsieur Owen, unless you mind such remarks, come again. I need not tell you that I am used to them."

"Mind them?" said Mr. Owen, with some scorn. "Ay, as the wind that passes by me."

Mr. Owen's carriage was waiting at the door below—for he kept his carriage now—and he was stepping into it, when by the gaslight he suddenly caught sight of a pale face passing by

"James Crankey!" he said.

Surprised to hear his name, the young man turned round. A sudden hope rushed to John Owen's heart; but he had self-control enough to dissemble. He greeted the young man cordially, and, without seeming to heed his coldness and reserve, he pressed him to accompany him home. Even by the dull street light, he saw James Crankey redden deeply, perhaps because his

attire was shabby and poor, perhaps for some other reason, yet he accepted and drove home with his once detested rival. Mr. Owen had supped, but he ordered a second supper for his guest; he partook of it with him; he was cordial, gay, witty, brilliant. Much on his guard as James Crankey habitually was, he was no match for an older man, and one, too, accustomed to master minds. Mr. Owen had soon learned that he was poor, leading much the same life he himself once had led, writing articles for indifferent magazines, for cheap publications, selling what he had, talent, with the tantalising consciousness that he had not more to sell; all this Mr. Owen learned; but on the subject that most interested him, he carefully forbore to touch.

At the close of an hour, during which he had more than once cast restless looks towards the door, as if expecting some one to enter, James Crankey rose to go. Mr. Owen chose this moment; but as his lips opened to put a careless

question, James Crankey, colouring slightly, said :

“ I am sorry not to have had the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Owen, but I hope another time——”

“ Mrs. Owen ! ” interrupted Owen ; “ who told you I was married ? ”

“ And are you not ? ” asked James Crankey, with sparkling eyes.

Mr. Owen did not reply at once ; he fastened a keen look on the young man’s face ; he saw him waiting in breathless suspense for his reply ; he gave it slowly :

“ No.”

A flash of joy shot across James Crankey’s pale features ; his look lit, his lip trembled. With a keen pang, Mr. Owen saw but too clearly that he knew nothing of Grace. But he was inured to repeated disappointments ; so, mastering this feeling and repressing a sigh, he said quietly :

“ Well, Mr. Crankey, come and see me again,

or rather," he added, correcting himself, "why should you not stay with me? Remember, young man, that I too have been poor and struggling, and see me now. You are young, and you have talent," he said, laying his hand on the young man's shoulder, "I can lead you to better things than you are doing now. I want a secretary—be mine."

He spoke very kindly, for the memory of the days when he had seen this young man with Grace, to whom he was related, who had protected his youth, who had held him dear, rose vividly before Mr. Owen. James Crankey thanked him, and declined, rather coldly; but Mr. Owen, so proud, so haughty with all men, would not be denied; he overruled his objections, he condescended to argue, to entreat; and James Crankey, moved, perhaps, by secret and natural ambition—flattered, too, to be so entreated—finally consented.

Mr. Owen was imperious, but he had a great

virtue; he knew not what insolence to inferiors in position or fortune was: James Crankey was cool and respectful, without servility. The patron and his *protégé* went on admirably. The one solitary point they had in common; their love for a woman, lost to one by her indifference, to the other by her anger, but lost to both, a love equally hopeless, and different, too, in each according to their years, only bound them the more closely. Yet it was the subject on which they never spoke; from first to last, the name of Grace was not mentioned between them.

But there is a silent speech, known to all. James Crankey remembered at whose door he had met Mr. Owen; he knew, too, that he daily visited the French actress; he saw, as he conceived, the memory of Grace outraged by such a rival; he could not refrain from many a tacit reproach. Night after night, when Mr. Owen came in, he found the young man sitting up, pale, silent, studious; night after night he had to

meet the look of sorrow and surprise that seemed to say, "And can you thus forget her?" Mr. Owen understood him well enough; he felt that James Crankey could certainly resent to see thus forgotten the woman whom he had vainly loved. He did not feel angry with the young man for his coldness—perhaps he liked him all the better for it—but neither did he condescend to remove James Crankey's mistake, nor to explain his own conduct; and, of course, he did not cease visiting Mademoiselle Aurelie.

He found a strange, soothing charm in her society; a charm which he himself scarcely knew, yet which daily grew deeper. The little she told him of herself, and she was sparing of such remarks, touched and interested him; but one day she spoke more clearly. She was rather unwell, and received him, French fashion, in her bedroom. She lay half reclining on a sofa, and looked ill and languid. Externals rarely caught Mr. Owen's eye, yet he could not but notice with

surprise a crucifix and a Madonna ; under the Madonna a taper was burning. He looked at it curiously. Mademoiselle Aurelie saw this, and said :

“ My true name is Marie, and sinner though I have been, I have never forgotten my heavenly patroness. That taper burns there for a vow.”

“ What vow ? ” indiscreetly asked Mr. Owen.

She did not answer ; but resumed :

“ Yes, I have been a great sinner—but Monsieur Owen, I hope you do not believe all the world says of me ; and yet I do not excuse myself—I might have been good—it was not love, want, or greed of gold drove me to wrong—it was slander. I was accused unjustly ; I got reckless, and deserved every accusation. It was wrong and very foolish—sorrow and repentance came too late, and—but I am wearying you—mine is such an old story ; yet one last confession : do you know that Aurelie, of whose adventures the world is full, Aurelie who has had Princes of

blood royal at her feet, Aurelie who without beauty, without youth, without anything to attract, could yet if she chose, be adored by more than one lover; for such are men, Monsieur Owen; do you know that once only in a short life, alas, too long, she was very near being in love, you would never guess with whom—with you. Yes, with you,” she said, answering his look of surprise, “and shall I tell you why? You are the first man whom I have seen for three entire months, and who has treated me like any other woman. You alone have not heaped me with flattery and with insults. You have treated poor despised Aurelie like a lady—like a woman. Ah! if you knew,” she added, pressing her hand to her brow, “if you knew how dearly we poor outcasts pay for our rule of an hour. Aurelie has been, is even now, the envy of many an austere lady! Aurelie’s riches, Aurelie’s jewels, Aurelie’s sway over men are grudged to her—Aurelie has been adored, really

adored, but with all this she has been humbled, insulted, dragged down to the dust until in the despair of her heart, she has said to Heaven : Take me, ay take me with all my sins upon me ! Thy other world cannot be more fearful than this."

She raised her head : there was a deep flush on her cheek, and the passion of the moment gave light to her sunken eyes, and to her whole face a sort of beauty. Her strange confession still rang in his ears, still troubled his heart. With surprise, and not without shame, he woke to the knowledge that he had attached himself to this poor sinner with an affection, which, though not love, partook of its nature, for it was serious and sincere. Now of all sad and dangerous things, Mr. Owen held none so sad, as for a man to really like a degraded woman, howsoever good or generous in other respects. And he was right ; for to like is to esteem, and to like without esteem is a ceaseless torment, a pang that never

dies. And thus some who have begun in idleness and ended in a true passion, have married on its strength until their best feelings have turned on them like serpents, and stung them to the end of their days. In such peril Mr. Owen was not, yet half in jest, half in earnest he said :

“Mademoiselle Aurelie, you are very imprudent: I must come no more; for if I come I shall like you too much, offend you, and lose the good character you give me.”

Aurelie reddened, then smiled very sadly :

“There is no fear,” she replied, “else should I have spoken? But there is no fear. You love another woman too well, ever to care a day or an hour for Aurelie.”

Mr. Owen become crimson, and looked displeased.

“Who told you that?” he asked, rather sharply.

“No one,” quietly replied Aurelie, “I saw it. I saw it the first evening you came here, I saw

you had come to seek, not pleasure like the others, but forgetfulness. I know that feeling. You are prosperous; your ambition is gratified, the sun shines on you, yet you seem to live in a dark cloud. I often look at you when I am acting—I can interest you, I never can make you laugh—laugh! I cannot make you smile. I tried the other evening when I was acting that comic character—that part which you say I act so well. The whole of that elegant and courtly house echoed again with laughter and applause—but serious as you had entered it, you left, Monsieur Owen.”

He did not answer one word. She resumed :

“Do not imagine I am seeking for your confidence; but I can see that you suffer—I do see it. How she is lost to you, by position, by marriage—you know best—do not dream I even try to know her name. Ah! Monsieur Owen, I feel you would never tell that name to Aurelie.”

She spoke with melancholy bitterness : he did not contradict her ; she was indeed the last person to whom he would have breathed the name of Grace.

“ Well,” resumed Aurelie after a pause, “ that was not what I meant to say. Did you speak in jest a while ago, or were you seriously afraid of attaching yourself to me ? What a strange fear, Monsieur Owen—why any one can see there is a thought never sleeps in your heart, that you live within the charmed ring of memory or hope. Well, your silence shows me you do not like all this ; let us speak of other things : how did you like my acting last night ? ”

“ It was as usual perfect.”

“ I am glad you liked it. I acted for you. I always act for some one. When you are not there, I act for an old Frenchman in the pit. He never applauds me, but turns his head towards his right shoulder, and nods approvingly every now and then ; if he remains stiff

I am chill; but when he smiles Aurelie is inspired."

"A strange selection."

"I go by instinct, and instinct sometimes leads me better. Do you remember that dark lady who was so rich, and who used to frequent St. James's so much some years ago. Her name was Mademoiselle Lee; she was very rich; she was not handsome, but she dressed magnificently, and she had beautiful eyes. Oh, you must have remarked her; her box was always full of people. Well, I used to act for her, because I could see she enjoyed my acting. She was a very joyous person; I once set my heart on making her cry, but I no more could than I could make you laugh the other night. She used to throw me beautiful flowers, and once she threw me a handsome bracelet, and once too she wrote to me."

"*She* wrote to you!" he exclaimed, speaking for the first time.

“Yes, Monsieur, *she* wrote to me. Alas! I was not the Aurelie I have since become; I was virtuous and very proud of my virtue. Miss Lee took an interest in me, and she wrote to tell me that I was too young to live alone, and to offer me a safe and honourable home. Vain alas! was her kindness.”

“Can I see that letter?” interrupted Mr. Owen. “You do not object, do you?—you have it still?”

“Oh, yes; I keep it here with my other treasures.”

She opened a small cabinet at her hand, and drew forth a casket; in it were, as she said, her treasures—strange treasures; a sampler worked in her schooldays; little records of early friends; packets of letters in girlish handwriting; things of no worth, but most dear. Last of all, she drew forth a letter in its envelope, a costly bracelet, and a bouquet of long-faded yellow roses.

With a moved hand Mr. Owen opened that letter so long written; it was short and frank: with reluctance he gave it back to Aurelie. She folded it and put it away carefully: then she showed him the bracelet, and asked if it was not very handsome.

“Very,” he replied.

“She took it off her arm to throw it to me. Oh, how I remember that night! It was my first triumph. When I was applauded till the whole house rang; when I was recalled twice—Mademoiselle Lee’s box was near the stage—I saw her as I see you now, as near and as well. She sat in front, with ladies and gentlemen around her. She wore a gold-coloured dress, with roses in her hair, and these roses in her hand. She sparkled with jewels, and looked like a queen. When I was recalled, I saw her unfasten one of the bracelets on her arm, hide it in her bouquet—then she dropped both at my feet. Ah! I was very proud—very happy. I

wore that bracelet a long time; but when I lost my fair name, and with my fair name—all, I put it away and wore it no more. I did not want her to see it and reproach me even with a look, and then I had plenty of bracelets; and half through pride, half through shame, I hid away that one with the letter, with the roses. Yes, those flowers keep their scent a long time," she added, as she saw him bending over them.

Ah! he too, remembered that night, and Grace in her box gay and happy, like a queen indeed, with her court around her. He remembered her with those very flowers in her hand and on her lap. The whole scene stood before him bright, vivid, and tormenting as a dream—a thing real as truth, untangible as air. With a flushed brow and trembling lips he pushed away these flowers from him: they fell on the floor; Aurelie quickly picked them up, looked at them with concern, then gave him a glance of reproach.

He did not heed it; but with a brief excuse he abruptly left her.

“Some are haunted!” he thought, as he walked out, hot and feverish, in the cool night air; “and surely I am of them. Even in the home of a French actress I must find memorials of her! What tempted her to give that bracelet and write that letter, and throw those flowers to that girl? Did she foresee I would go there some day, and do it to torment me? Or, rather,” he thought, with sorrow and self-reproach, “I wanted to forget her, and she shows me it is impossible. As we see the light of stars that for a thousand years and more have ceased to burn, so some beings—even when they vanish in the deep gloom of Time—leave all their light and their brightness behind them.”

When Mr. Owen entered his home that night, he found James Crankey sitting up as usual in the study, reading; on hearing his patron enter, he looked up slowly: Mr. Owen had remained

out unusually late, and the young secretary's face was unusually serious and severe.

"Mr. Hanley has been here," he said.

"Mr. Hanley!" exclaimed Owen. "Why it is years since I saw him, I think. And what had he to say?"

"Much which it would not become me to repeat."

"Pshaw!" carelessly said Owen, "you do not think I mind Hanley, do you? and depend upon it that what he said to you he wished you to repeat to me."

"He requested me to do so."

"A message! Let's hear it."

"'Tell, Owen,' said Mr. Hanley, 'that he would better employ his time by dining with me, than by supping with Mademoiselle Aurelie.'"

"Poor Aurelie!" said Mr. Owen compassionately. "And how do you know Mr. Hanley?" he suddenly added; "this is not surely the first time you have seen him?"

"Oh, no!" coolly answered James Crankey.

"I saw him years ago at Miss Lee's."

Mr. Owen started with something like anger. He could not bear to hear the name of Grace. He rose, and said coldly:

"Mr. Crankey, you will oblige me by never mentioning the name of that lady.

James Crankey smiled bitterly; without another word Mr. Owen left the room.

It took him days to recover his usual equanimity; and when he did recover he went no more near Mademoiselle Aurelie. Alas! he was not better than other men. He still liked—he certainly pitied her; but with the fleeting sort of fancy he had felt for her, vanished the charm of her presence. What could he care now for the society of a fallen woman!

And thus two months had passed, when one morning Mr. Owen found a packet on his table. He opened it: withered yellow roses, a bracelet, a letter, fell out. On a slip of paper he read:

“The vow was a prayer for a happy death: when you receive this it will have been granted. Adieu, Monsieur Owen; others when they die say, ‘Remember me.’ Forget Aurelie; it is her last wish.”

“Poor girl!” thought Mr. Owen; “she guessed the truth and sent me these. Poor girl!” And the next day he learned that she had died of consumption, conscious and deserted by all, save eager creditors, who—though the very furniture was a fortune more than sufficient to pay them—had crowded, like birds of prey, around that sad death-bed.

“Poor girl!” again thought Mr. Owen, “I wish I had known it, or that she had sent for me;” and he forgot that the most fallen can be proud.

CHAPTER XII.



RATHER uncivilly, Mr. Owen had never returned Mr. Hanley's call; but Mr. Hanley was not discouraged; he came again; this time he found him within. And as freely as if they had never ceased to be friends, he said, in his careless way :

"Come and dine with me to-morrow."

Mr. Owen as carelessly accepted, and asked after Monsieur Jean Baptiste.

"Ah! poor Jean Baptiste," replied Mr. Hanley, with a sigh; "he died last year, a victim to his sense of honour: he rose from the bed of sickness to cook a dinner for a few friends of mine; erysipelas came on; in a week he was in

his grave; however, I have found one of his disciples, and, under my guidance and direction, he may yet do something. Well, it is settled: you come to-morrow."

Mr. Owen was faithful to the appointment. The disciple of Monsieur Jean Baptiste "distinguished himself," to use the French idiom; the dishes were exquisite; the wines were old and mellow: it was a delicious little dinner. Mr. Owen liked it none the less for the presence of Annie Hanley. She was now seventeen; fair, blooming, and gay; with brown hair, soft brown eyes, a complexion of lilies and roses, a pretty smile and prettier dimples. She was merry and good-tempered too; Mr. Owen was growing into the years when youth is very pleasant; he had learned in the world how to render himself agreeable to women, he did his best to please and entertain Miss Annie, and he fully succeeded.

"And what do you think of Annie?" asked Mr. Hanley, when she had left the table.

"The most charming, artless girl I have seen this long time," replied Mr. Owen.

"So she is, and obedient too; that girl, sir, has never said me nay—and never will. And she has not grown up amiss, has she?"

"Indeed, no; Miss Hanley is very good-looking."

"John," said Mr. Hanley, leaning his two elbows on the table, "you know I always liked you; the world says you are very wild——"

"The world is very kind," interrupted Owen, with a sneer.

"But if you, John Owen, will, as a man of honour, promise to reform and make Annie happy, no one else shall have her. You have seen her; a pretty girl and a good girl, who will have fifteen thousand pounds on her wedding day, and after my death all I have."

Mr. Owen smiled.

"Mr. Hanley," he said; "Annie is seventeen

—I am thirty-eight and more ; my hair is turning gray.”

“Dye it,” impatiently said Mr. Hanley, “or get a wig ; make Annie happy, and she will not mind your hair. And now, man, say yes or no.”

Mr. Owen leaned his cheek on his hand. Five years he had sought Grace, and was as far from finding her as on the first day. She was lost to him ; his life was sad and lonely ; should it ever remain thus ? Annie was pretty and pleasing ; why deny his lonely home that bright young guest—his solitary life that solace. He looked up.

“Let Miss Hanley but consent,” he said, “and I take you at your word.”

Mr. Hanley rang for his niece. In vain Owen attempted to object ; Annie was in the room before he had done speaking. In a clear, business-like fashion, Mr. Hanley informed his niece that Mr. Owen did her the honour to

wish her to become his wife; that he, Mr. Hanley, consented, and that she now had to decide. Mr. Owen looked up rather curiously into Annie's face; he found her eyes fastened on him; she reddened, but did not withdraw the gaze, and very frankly she said:

“Yes.”

“There's a good girl!” exclaimed Mr. Hanley, delighted; “and now make the tea, child.”

And thus it was decided that Mr. Owen was to marry Annie Hanley.

Mr. Hanley was for immediate union; but Mr. Owen insisted for a two months' courtship: he wanted to know more of Annie, and Annie to have time, should she repent, to retract. He saw her daily; but never alone; Mr. Hanley would not allow it. Mr. Owen might spend a day with Annie in his presence; but not five minutes out of his sight. Annie did not care, nor did Mr. Owen. Mr. Hanley was no restriction on the calm affection he felt for this young

girl, nor on the quiet pleasure he took in her society. Five serious words they never exchanged; but laughed and jested all the time they were together. Annie had not long left a country boarding-school; she had no friends, no companions in London. Her uncle's house was solitary and dull; her only gay and happy moments were spent with her betrothed. Her face lit with pleasure when he came, and clouded with regret when he left. Nor did Annie care to conceal that she liked him very much.

"Dear, dear Mr. Owen, what should I do without you?" she often said, and Mr. Owen, though he had not the vanity to think Annie was in love with him, did not dislike her girlish fondness.

Their courtship had lasted a month, when Miss Hanley expressed a wish to see Mr. Owen's house. Immediately he asked her and her uncle to dine with him. Annie was charmed at the idea, and Mr. Hanley consented, but

with the express stipulation that the disciple and successor of Monsieur Jean-Baptiste should dress the dinner. A pleasant though quiet repast it was. Mr. James Crankey was present ; with jealous indignation he had heard that Mr. Owen was going to marry ; with much bitterness he beheld the fresh, young bride his patron was taking ; and gloomily he listened to her light laugh and girlish talk ; with secret wrath he saw Mr. Owen look and smile at Annie, and address her half freely, half fondly, and lay himself out to please her with more than a lover's studious care. To look on was more than James Crankey could bear ; he never opened his lips to the young girl but once, and scarcely glanced at her the whole evening. Annie minded him still less—he was Mr. Owen's secretary, viz., no one. She so far forgot his presence as to say in her heedless way :

“Oh, I shall change ever so many things when I come here—” then she stopped short,

and reddened; and Mr. Owen smiled, and James Crankey felt as if he could have knocked his patron down.

It was on the day following this, that Mr. Owen was dictating a political pamphlet to his secretary, when the door opened and a servant appeared with the information that the man from the nursery-garden was below.

“Bring up the flowers,” said Mr. Owen, pausing in his dictation.

In a few minutes the door opened again, and the servant came in bearing a bouquet of flowers, no less beautiful in hue, than exquisite in fragrance; flowers rare at all times, and doubly rare in that season. Mr. Owen looked at it with a critical eye, then signified his approbation.

“It will do; how much?”

“Five guineas, sir.”

Mr. Owen threw down on the table the five gold and silver pieces, then said briefly:

“Take it to Miss Hanley with my compliments.

Stop, Crankey, you are a better judge of these things than I am : what do you say to it ? Is it good enough to send to Miss Hanley ?”

James Crankey sat gnawing his pen. “And she loved that man,” he thought, “that man who when he is tired of an abandoned French actress, woos a girl of sixteen. God forgive you, Mr. Owen, I cannot.”

Mr. Owen’s question jarred strangely on such thoughts. James Crankey looked up, and rather bitterly replied :

“I think, sir, that such flowers as these would Miss Lee have liked.”

John Owen gave him a kindling look, but he signed the servant to withdraw, then calmly he resumed his dictating from the very words where he had left off : “Rendering apparent the total want of principle which had throughout marked the honourable member’s conduct.”

Here he paused, and said ironically : “What convenient things words are ; here am I civilly

telling that fellow he is no better than a scoundrel. And so," he added, with an abrupt and somewhat perfidious transition; "and so, Mr. Crankey, you do not approve my forthcoming marriage! pray, why so? Do you see anything objectionable in Miss Hanley? Surely she is pretty, and young enough," he added, with a sneer; "why she is barely seventeen; could I in conscience wish for a younger bride?"

James Crankey bit his lip. Mr. Owen continued:

"Perhaps you think her too young? James, you know nothing about it; her youth is a priceless boon I cannot purchase too dearly; for youth is innocence, and innocence is ignorance, and knowledge born of sin in Paradise is the saddest fruit this earth can bear. Annie is pretty, young, good, rich; she is willing to have me. Pray, why should I not have her?"

He fixed his eye very keenly on James Crankey. The young man alternately reddened

and turned pale as his patron spoke. But all he said, was :

“ You are happy, sir ; you can forget.”

A flush rose to Mr. Owen’s brow.

“ Boy !” he said, with some sternness, “ speak of what you understand.”

James Crankey did not reply. Mr. Owen resumed his dictating, and there the conversation ceased. But forbearing though Mr. Owen was, he wearied of seeing James Crankey sit up as silently reproachful when he came back from visiting his future bride, as when he had supped with Mademoiselle Aurelie. Finding him thus late one evening, he said half kindly, half ironically, and laying his hand on the young man’s shoulder as he spoke :

“ What keeps you up so late ? Work less, my boy ; there is plenty of time to wrinkle your young brow.”

“ I cannot sleep,” drily replied James Crankey.

"Go out then and enjoy yourself; 'tis your time for pleasure."

"I find no pleasure in pleasure," was the gloomy answer.

Mr. Owen gave him a look of mingled pity and displeasure, and turned away.

And now the courtship was drawing to a close, and Mr. Owen daily spent more time with his betrothed. Mr. Hanley, however, had something else to do than to be present; it often happened that Mr. Owen came too early, and had to wait some time in the library, debarred from the solace of Annie Hanley's company. One afternoon, not knowing how to beguile the time, and feeling tired, he slept. When he woke he saw Annie standing by him.

"Why, Annie!" he exclaimed, sitting up; "What brought you here? Are you not afraid of me?"

"No," replied Annie, quietly; and she sat down by him.

He smoothed her hair, and looked kindly in her face. He liked this young girl to be so trusting and so free.

“I wanted to speak to you,” said Annie very seriously; “you wear something around your neck, Mr. Owen; where is it?”

Mr. Owen hastily thrust his hand into his bosom, then turned pale—the portrait of Grace was gone.

“Here it is,” quietly resumed Annie, taking it out of her little apron pocket; “I cut the ribbon with my scissors as you slept; a ribbon is no good: have a chain, Mr. Owen.”

Mr. Owen took back the portrait, and looked at the young girl, silent and stern. He little relished the liberty his future bride had taken; and his temper was too proud and too jealous not to resent that any eyes should thus pry into the secrets of his heart.

“I know that lady,” resumed Annie, “I have seen her.”

"Ah! when? Speak, child, speak."

"Seven or eight years ago," replied Annie, looking surprised at his vehemence.

His face fell on hearing the answer.

"She was a very rich lady," resumed Annie. "She lived in Park Lane; my uncle took me to her house. She showed me all her handsome things; she wore a shining satin dress; she took me on her kness, kissed me, and, looking into my face, she said: 'She has fine eyes.' She sent me away with a lapful of sweets. She was a dark, handsome lady; I liked her very much."

Mr. Owen's anger melted away as Annie spoke; he drew her nearer to him; he looked kindly into the soft brown eyes on which, years before, the brighter look of Grace had rested with pleasure.

"Annie," he said, "you are a good girl; but why did you cut the ribbon?"

"To see what you wore around your neck."

"And how did you know I wore anything

around my neck? By the ribbon, I suppose, which your feminine eyes spied out."

"Not merely by the ribbon," replied Annie, shrewdly nodding. "You have a habit, when you are talking to uncle about law or politics, or anything, of thrusting in your right hand now and then, as you did just now, but unconsciously, as if to feel that it is all right, and you go on talking all the time. I asked you the other day why you did so: you answered: 'My liver is affected—I have a pain there;' but you reddened, Mr. Owen, and you forgot that the liver is on the right side, and not on the left.

Mr. Owen smiled and sighed.

"There is no keeping a secret from a woman," he said; "young or old, it matters little: all have the divining gift from their very birth."

"Why did you not marry her?" earnestly asked Annie.

"Because God would not have it so," he replied,

with the bitter resignation of one who knows himself powerless in an Almighty hand.

“Is she dead?”

“Dead!” he echoed with a start, “God forbid! Annie, Annie, question me no more; these are things to bear, but not to speak of.”

Annie looked at him wistfully.

“Mr. Owen,” she said, “God is good. You will meet that lady yet, and marry her some day.”

“Which is telling me plainly you will not have me, eh, Annie?” said Mr. Owen, smiling at her girlish art. Annie reddened. “Do not think I blame you,” he resumed. “You are right, Annie. I am too old, too world-worn for you, for any woman save one—her nature I never could affect or darken. Well, ’tis useless to think of that now,” he added impatiently. “What is done is done—leave me, Annie; when Mr. Hanley comes in I will speak to him.”

“He will be very angry with you,” said Annie.

“Let him. We are always better friends for a good quarrel.”

Annie left him reluctantly. Mr. Owen waited an hour for Mr. Hanley's return—in vain; at length he was obliged to go, and defer the explanation until the following day.

He sat dictating to Mr. James Crankey that same evening, when the door opened, and a servant announced “Miss Hanley.”

“Annie!” exclaimed Mr. Owen, as he saw her pale face at the door. “Why, child, what has happened?”

He hastened to receive her, and lead her in; the servant closed the door and withdrew. Mr. Owen led Annie to a chair and, sitting down by her, he again asked what had happened.

Annie looked in his face, then she burst into tears, and threw herself in his arms.

“Oh, dear, dear Mr. Owen!” she exclaimed, sobbing passionately, “*you* will not turn me out—I am sure *you* will not.”

Mr. Owen guessed it all. Annie had taken on herself the whole blame, and, to spare him, borne the full brunt of her uncle's wrath. He was shocked, and much moved. For the first time he pressed the young girl to his heart; for the first time he kissed her cheek, now bathed with tears. But chancing to look up, and to see James Crankey, who stood looking on like one transfixed, he frowned impatiently, then turning back to Annie, he gently put her away, begged her to be calm, and gradually succeeded in pacifying her. This settled, he ordered his carriage and at once took Annie to the house of a married friend, by whose wife Miss Hanley was received with hospitable kindness. As they drove to the house, Annie had simply told him her brief story: his conjecture was a correct one. Annie, by taking on herself the refusal of marrying Mr. Owen, had incurred her uncle's displeasure: in a moment of wrath he had turned her out of his house into the street. "I know no one

in London," said Annie, "and so I came to you."

"Poor little thing!" he said smiling, "turned out for my sake. Why, Annie, how have I deserved so much kindness from you?"

"Ah, Mr. Owen!" replied Annie ingenuously, "I would do anything for you—you love her so much!" And it was a good reason: if Annie was but a girl, she had all the instincts of a woman.

The next morning Mr. Owen called on Mr. Hanley, but in vain he explained all. Mr. Hanley was inexorable.

"Sir," he said, "I have reared that girl on the clear understanding that she should not say me nay; she said me nay yesterday, sir. I will never give her a penny, or allow her to cross my threshold again. If you marry her, I will give you the fifteen thousand pounds on your wedding-day for the honour of my word—but for no other reason."

He seemed much incensed ; but Mr. Owen mistrusted this great anger. Mr. Hanley was known for doubling. Owen knew, too, that he had a strange hankering sort of liking for himself ; that he wanted to secure him by any means, bad or fair : in this blunt speech he saw but a ruse to make him marry Annie, *bongré malgré*. Mr. Owen, however, was more than a match for such arts. He left him, saying with seeming concern : “I see, Mr. Hanley, that Annie’s name must change from Hanley to Owen.”

“I do not care that about it,” said Mr. Hanley, snapping his fingers.

Mr. Owen was right enough. In a moment of passion Mr. Hanley had turned out his niece ; but his anger soon cooled down ; he caused Annie to be followed ; before he went to bed that night he knew that Mr. Owen was a man of honour, and that Annie was in a safe home. He chuckled at the trap into which both had fallen, though not of his laying how

could Mr. Owen in conscience decline marrying a young girl turned out of her home for his sake? And how could she, in her desolate position, refuse to have him? But Mr. Hanley had reckoned without John Owen. His position towards Annie was certainly a difficult one; yet he found means to elude the difficulty. Annie Hanley became Annie Hanley Owen: Mr. Owen's adopted daughter. As such he presented her to his friends, and gave her the authority of a mistress in his bachelor home.

Annie was delighted; her uncle was enraged; every one was surprised; Mr. Owen, who never cared much about opinion, gave no explanation of his motives; but he thought proper to address a warning to James Crankey. He gave him clearly to understand that Annie, reared in luxury, could marry none but a rich man.

"I shall never marry," coldly interrupted the young man.

Mr. Owen smiled and said no more. To Annie

he said nothing : he had already noticed the cool sort of careless contempt with which she regarded Mr. James Crankey.

Ingratitude was not Mr. Owen's sin : Annie had lost all for his sake ; he did his best to make her happy ; he took her out as often as he could ; he gave her every pleasure money could procure. Annie was young, fond of gaiety ; she had left a boarding-school for a dull home. She was charmed with the change, and half regretted not being the wife of Mr. Owen, "who was so agreeable, so kind, and so very superior to every other man she saw." Annie became very fond of Mr. Owen, whom indeed she had always liked.

And as Mr. Owen also liked, in his way, this kind-hearted, good-tempered young girl, they might have got on very well together, spite of some secret ennui and weariness on his part at having to go out so often to parties, for which he did not care, if Annie had not fallen into an unlucky mistake. She saw that often when Mr.

Owen spoke to her, and seemed most gay, there was a cloud on his brow ; often, too, she detected a little weariness in his smile, and caught in the very tones of his voice an echo of disappointment and pain. "Mr. Owen is not happy," thought Annie ; "O ! if I could make him as happy as I am,—as happy as he makes me !" Ay, Annie, if you could give him your light heart, your free temper, and your seventeen years ! But Annie, more kind-hearted than experienced, very seriously set herself about making Mr. Owen happy.

She began with his breakfast. Mr. Owen was fond of toast : Annie would toast his bread with her own hands, and she toasted it very badly ; he liked, as he drank his tea, to look at his paper lying by him,—Annie would spare him that trouble, and read to him, and she read the very things he did not care for, and omitted those he wanted. Mr. Owen, amused with her simplicity, bore all this for some time ; but at length he lost patience.

“I must breakfast out,” he thought; and so he did almost every day in the week.

But Annie was not conquered. Annie would see herself that Mr. Owen’s dinner was to his liking. She entered the kitchen realms, and caused a revolution there. She had learned something of Jean-Baptiste’s art; instead of the plain fare which Mr. Owen’s keen appetite relished, Annie cooked him dainty dishes that gave him the nightmare. He tried to remonstrate, in vain; he submitted. For a proud, passionate man, he was strangely patient in domestic concerns; but a severe bilious attack proving the consequence of this luxurious diet, he gave in: he pleaded increase of business, and dined out.

Of the few comforts of his home, one remained to him,—his cigar. Smoking made Annie’s head ache; so Mr. Owen spent in his own room, in solitary communion with his own thoughts, hours not happy,—he was not a happy man,—but the

least bitter of his daily life ; but Annie thought this too hard. One evening, when after half an hour's chat, he rose to leave her as usual, she said, coaxingly :

“Do stay, and smoke here, Mr. Owen.”

“My dear Annie ! it makes your head ache.”

“Look !” said Annie, shrewdly. She drew a little cigar-case from her pocket, and showed it triumphantly. “Oh ! I smoke, I smoke so well, Mr. Owen. I stole some of your strong Havannahs ; I learned to smoke ; it made me very sick at first, but now I do not mind. Dear Mr. Owen ! I thought it too bad you should not be master in your own drawing-room !”

Mr. Owen was confounded ; for the first time he spoke to Annie with anger.

“Miss Hanley !” he exclaimed, “I am surprised at your unfeminine tastes. I beg you will throw that cigar-case into the fire at once.”

Annie obeyed ; but tears stood in her eyes.

“O dear, Mr. Owen !” she said, “How can

you say I have a taste for smoking, and how can you call me Miss Hanley, when you know I am Annie Hanley Owen?"

"Poor little thing!" thought Mr. Owen, already sorry for his anger, "she meant it well, sure enough." So he went and sat down by her, and took her hand, and called her Annie Hanley Owen. Annie was good-tempered, and easily pacified. With a smile, she lit Mr. Owen's cigar, handed it to him, then played and sang to him for the rest of the evening.

By locking himself up with James Crankey, under the convenient pretence of intense business, Mr. Owen partly eluded her gentle companionship. But this was not all. Annie would sit up for him when he stayed out late, to bid him good-night; early as he might get up, Annie was up before him to bid him good-morning. She warmed his slippers, she lit his cigar, she picked up his handkerchief, she handed him his book. And then she worked for him,—

purses, cigar-cases, card-cases, pen-wipers, quills wreathed with beads and with tassels to them, sky-blue braces delicately embroidered in white silk ; a variety of Greek or Turkish caps, which out of civility he had to wear ; a world of slippers, woollen cuffs to keep his wrists warm, cambric shirts ; and, to his horror, a waistcoat with rose-bud sprigs, which, not, even to please Annie, would Mr. Owen wear,—and all this sadly wearied him ; and, to her surprise, he did not look a happier man.

Then poor Annie thought that she was not sufficiently affectionate towards her adopted father. She conquered her reserve, and became a fond daughter. When Mr. Owen came in, Annie went and sat by him, and, passing her arm within his, looked up in his face, half-shyly, half-freely ; sometimes she sat on a low stool at his feet, and caressingly laid her head on his knee ; or, standing behind his chair, she gently bent over his shoulder, and in her schoolgirl

fashion, called him, "Dear, dear Mr. Owen." Now all this might have been charming if Annie had been his betrothed, or his young wife ; if he could have returned her childish endearments with the fervour of his maturer years ; if he could have drunk freely from the sweet spring of her youth ; if, reposing his fevered heart on one so fresh and innocent,—if, giving her such fondness as he had left to bestow, he had won in rich return all the love Annie had to give ;—ay, all this might have been charming for a few weeks, nay, even for a few months ; but circumstanced as they were, these gentle caresses of his adopted daughter yielded Mr. Owen no pleasure. Alas ! there is no denying it, they sadly wearied him.

Annie was a child, he was a man ; their minds, their tempers, their hearts were as wide apart as their years. Mr. Owen liked her very well, and he could call her his adopted daughter ; but he could not make a father's heart beat for her in his bosom ; she was not his flesh and his blood,

no mysterious yearning drew him towards her as towards his offspring; and, spite all Annie's efforts, he remained kind, but rather cool. He knew she meant well, but her fondness, her little attentions, were so many bonds he brooked impatiently. He thought it hard to have that great inconvenience of married life,—loss of liberty, and yet to enjoy none of its rewards. To this trying dispensation he found but one comfort,—that Annie was not his wife. More than ever he felt and knew that there was but one being on earth with whom he could brook to share his life, whose presence would be more pleasant and more dear than his solitude. At length he could bear no more. "I wonder," he desperately thought one morning, "what fathers do with their grown-up daughters?" The inward reply was a flash of light, "They find some good fellow who marries them." But Mr. Owen was too fond of Annie to think any good fellow good enough for her. Of one he knew

too little, of the other too much ; yet some he found,—men of the world, well off, agreeable,—men to whom he could not object, and who thought Annie, what she was, a pleasant girl, who would make a good wife,—men, in short, who made Miss Hanley Owen what is called good offers ; but Annie rejected every one. “ Dear, dear Mr. Owen,” she said, passing her arm around his neck, “ I do not want to marry, I do not want to leave you ; besides,” she added, laughing, “ I do not like Mr. Rathford,” (the last admirer,) “ why I would as soon have Mr. Crankey.”

“ Who would not have you, Annie : Mr. Crankey will never marry.”

“ Because he is too poor ? ”

“ Because he has been disappointed in love,” ironically replied Mr. Owen.

Annie opened her brown eyes and looked curious, but Mr. Owen said no more. Annie saw very little of James Crankey. She met him occasionally about the house, and now and then

in the garden, a London garden with two or three trees, a few shrubs, a grass-plot and flowers—but where Miss Annie ventured on sunny mornings, that is to say, not often. On one of these rare occasions, a week after the conversation between her and Mr. Owen, Annie came down to the garden five minutes after Mr. James Crankey had entered it. Mr. Owen was out. She thought the opportunity a good one. She only wanted to look at the secretary and see what he was like; but he saw her, drew near and unexpectedly began a conversation. In the middle of it he suddenly broke off to say—

“Miss Hanley do you remember when and where we first met?”

“When I came to dine with Mr. Owen,” said Annie.

“Oh, no,” he replied, and a deep flush crossed his pale face, “we met seven years ago in a house in Park-lane. I was a boy, you were a child—do you remember?”

She remembered it all : she saw him at the feet of Grace kissing her hand, a boy-lover. "It is she whom he loves," thought Annie, "and Mr. Owen too—how strange ;" and aloud she said :

"I remember very well now ; it was in the house of a tall, dark lady, in a satin dress. Where is she now, Mr. Crankey ?"

"In the grave," he replied, sitting down on a bench by him, and bowing his head on his bosom.

His tears flowed and Annie's too. But he soon looked up, and smiling sadly, he said :

"Do not pity me—it is a happiness to remember her. She was to me as a divinity, and though she has forsaken this miserable earth, I cannot cease to worship—I knew you could not have forgotten her—who could ?"

He rose and walked away. Annie remained alone, much affected.

"Poor young man !" she thought, "that is

why he is always so quiet and so pale, and I, who thought him stupid. Was that Miss Lee so very handsome I wonder?"

She tried to remember the face of Grace, and memory failing her,—her portrait, but she had not observed it sufficiently at the time, and only a vague image floated dimly before her. "I wish I could see it again," thought Annie, and she thought about it until, like a true daughter of Eve she accomplished her object.

Mr. Owen, taught the value of ribbons by experience, had provided himself with a strong steel chain, of which Annie had often caught sight; it now occurred to her that this chain she had not seen lately, A few days' observation confirmed her conjectures; Mr. Owen no longer wore the portrait of Grace.

To remember is to suffer, and we cannot always suffer. Mr. Owen was not one of your patient spirits who sanctify sorrow. When memory became too bitter, he turned his back upon her, and

in the world's loud voice he drowned hers, so low, yet so penetrating. When the face of Grace haunted him too much, he put away her portrait, he banished her image, for weeks he forbade himself the indulgence of a look. In one of these moods he had, as Annie now perceived, ceased wearing that image, dear, yet tormenting. But where did he keep it? Chance soon led her to the discovery. Opening one day the door of his study she saw him standing with his back to her before a small cabinet; he opened one of the drawers, he drew out a Morocco case; he did not open it, but he put it back again and locked the drawer carefully. Annie withdrew softly, but the next time Mr. Owen forgot his keys, and he was rather careless, she stole upstairs, locked herself in the study, opened the cabinet drawer and taking out the morocco case, gave a long look at the portrait of Grace Lee. "She is not handsome after all," thought Annie, "yet what beautiful eyes, how soft, how deep, how brilliant. I

like her face too, dark yet bright. Did she love Mr. Crankey or Mr. Owen?"

Annie mused, but musing told her nothing; so she put back the portrait and stole away. The next day she again met James Crankey in the garden; she was the first to speak of Grace, and she spoke with such gentle and winning sympathy that the young man told her his whole story. How he had loved Grace from a boy, how fond she had been of him, but not in the way of love, how she had preferred Mr. Owen, who for some reason, which he knew not, had not married her, and how she was now dead or lost to both. Annie had read some love stories, but she had never heard any before this: it touched her very much. Mr. Crankey's tender sorrow too interested her more than Mr. Owen's sullen grief. It was so pathetic to see a young man of his age, who would never love, never marry, for the sake of a woman who had not loved him. And Mr. Owen, the favoured lover, was the more faithless;

he, a rich, prosperous man, a member of Parliament, with all his heart could wish for! "Poor Mr. Crankey?" thought Annie, and she lost no opportunity of showing him kindness and sympathy, and her interest in him waxed so strong, that she boldly resolved to give him a glimpse of Grace Lee's portrait. She imagined his surprise, his joy, and then it was so easy, and Mr. Owen need never know it.

The next time Mr. Owen forgot his keys, Annie, her heart beating with the consciousness that though "there was no harm in it," it was a wrong thing, stole up to the study, and took the portrait of Grace from the case, which she put back, for she thought "if I have not time to return it, seeing the case he will think all right," but as she came to this conclusion a heavy hand laid on her shoulder, made her turn around with a low cry. Mr. Owen stood behind her, pale and stern.

“Miss Hanley!” he said with flashing eyes;
“how dare you touch that portrait?”

Annie was too much frightened to reply. He took the portrait from her resistless hand, then sat down like a judge, and like a criminal Annie sank at his feet.

“Dear, dear Mr. Owen,” she said in tears, “I meant no harm, but he seemed so unhappy.”

“Has he seen it—did he suggest this to you?” interrupted Mr. Owen, his eyes lighting.

“Oh no; no one has seen it; it was all my own thought—do forgive me—for her sake.”

“Get up, Annie,” said Mr. Owen more mildly, “for her sake I forgive you; but, child, it is well he did not suggest this to you—well for you that you did not effect your purpose. I would have turned him out without pity, and much as I like you, Annie, never again would you have seen the face of John Owen.” All his features quivered with resentment at the mere idea. Annie rose much abashed.

"Dear Mr. Owen," she said, "I did it all out of pity—he suffers so much—"

"He suffer," interrupted Mr. Owen, with a bitter laugh, "he suffer! Show me then in him the wrinkled brow, the furrowed cheek, the hair prematurely gray of a cankering thought? His face is smooth as yours, Annie, as smooth and as fair. He suffer! Why he talks of his grief—'tis his delight—he can freely utter a name, which since I lost her, never passed my lips—he could wish to look on an image I am obliged to put away, it becomes such a living presence—ay, he could—because his boyish passion has long been dead and gone—if it ever was more than a dream."

"Oh! dear Mr. Owen," exclaimed Annie, reddening. "You are too hard upon him—indeed he loved her very truly—his heart is in her grave—he never can love another—"

"Pshaw, little girl!" interrupted Mr. Owen, with some scorn, "do not tell that to me, a man

near forty ! His heart is in her grave ! He could say the word ! He could believe it ! He never loved her or he would not think she could die ! So he boasts of his constancy to you—ay, let him—he has never felt as if he could annihilate memory—he has never felt the longing to drown in lighter loves, a passion too tormenting. I have tried to love a beautiful woman, to attach myself to a woman, good without virtue, seducing without beauty. I have tried to love you, Annie, a mere child. Do you think it was because I cared for beauty, for pleasure, for married happiness ? Annie—it was all to forget—it was because to suffer had become intolerable.”

Annie looked at him half frightened ; his brow was flushed with pain, strange pathos, strange sorrow were in his voice.

“Annie,” he resumed, taking her hand and making her sit down by him ; “forget what I have said, such things are not good for you

to hear. Think not I am angry with that lad because he feels not as I feel : he cannot : our heart is the mirror of our being, and there is as wide a difference between his boyish years and aspect and mine, as between his fond fancy, and that something stronger than will which a man can bear, but against which he cannot prevail, that has conquered upon me seven years of my life. Let him think of one who loved him, who helped to rear and teach him, who was the kind protectress of his youth. I grudge him not his thoughts—his gratitude—his fondness, for to nothing that I feel are they akin. If we had felt alike, Annie, and both as men loved with the same love one woman, do you think, young as you are, say do you think the same house could have held us both one hour? I know he does not like me much—well I have lost what he never had to lose, and he has been strangely jealous of me, and I for a moment never could feel jealous of him. For

her sake I took him here—for her sake I bear with him—for her sake I like him, but he must not try me too far. Annie, what made that young man choose you to hear and listen to the secrets of his heart?”

He looked at Annie; reddening, she said “she did not know.”

“Then I can tell you, Annie, for though he is subtle beyond his years, I know all his windings. He knows, Annie, who taught him, that there is no surer way to girl’s or woman’s heart than fond faithful hapless love for another woman? Would you have bestowed a thought upon him, Annie, but for this tale of passion with which he filled your young brain and troubled your girlish heart? Oh! Annie, Annie, you are growing very red, I hope the mischief is not done, for as true as you and I are sitting here, Annie, this young man in all this, had but one thought, to draw your attention—to interest

you—to make you like him—as he likes you, Annie.”

“Me!” cried Annie, with a start.

“Ay you, Annie. He liked you Annie, from the day you dined here with me. I saw it; I saw him sicken with pure jealousy. Whenever he knew I was going to see you, he turned livid; when I came back he looked desperate: I pitied his misery, and resolved to send him away somewhere before our wedding-day. When our marriage was broken off, he recovered health and life. When you came here, Annie, to live with me, I saw him flush with joy. I confess I should not have allowed him to remain in the house—but for once, John Owen, whom the world calls hard, was weak. He remembered how sweet and how dear is a loved presence, and so, with a vain warning, not to dream of more, he indulged Mr. James Crankey with the sight of Miss Annie Hanley Owen.”

Annie had heard him with a changing cheek;

when he ceased, she looked up; her face glowed crimson red; her soft brown eyes beamed with a troubled joy. Mr. Owen half smiled. Annie threw her arms around his neck. "Oh! dear, dear Mr. Owen," she said, "I am so happy."

"Because being young, pretty, and good, you have made the conquest of a penniless boy's heart! And pray what will all this lead to—marriage? With all my heart, Annie, but remember, I am not Mr. Hanley. I cannot give you fifteen thousand pounds on your wedding day, and Mr. Crankey has nothing."

"But, dear Mr. Owen," said Annie, coaxingly, "I do not want to leave you, nor does Mr. Crankey, I am sure."

"Thank you," rather shortly replied Mr. Owen. "I never could stand such a pair of pigeons."

"Pigeons! Mr. Owen," said Annie, looking ready to cry.

"Turtle-doves, Annie, if you like it better.

Well, 'tis no matter," he added, rising, "think no more about this, Annie, but leave it all to me."

Annie withdrew to her own room, and there she remained the best part of the day alternately happy or depressed as she thought Mr. Owen likely to have told the truth or, though unintentionally, to have deceived her. She did not see him again before the evening. He then sent for her, and she found him waiting in the drawing-room below; he made her sit down by him, and looking at her wistfully, he said:

"Annie, you are young. You know not yet that our best impulses are traitors who lure us to our ruin: unlucky was the day, Annie, when you first saw John Owen. To spare me an awkward explanation, you lost a kind uncle, a handsome fortune. In return I can give you nothing but pain. I called to-day on Mr. Hanley. Time has not much softened him. Two very different prospects shall I now set

before you. If you agree to marry a man of your uncle's choosing, Annie, and he pledges himself that he shall be such a man as a reasonable girl can like; he will give you ten thousand pounds, reinstate you in his affection, and in all your rights. If you marry to please yourself, your uncle gives you a thousand pounds, with his blessing, but both on the clearly understood condition that you renounce every claim on his inheritance,—on that wealth, Annie, which should be yours by right, and which, on Mr. Hanley's decease shall pass to a stranger, as solemnly pledged not to share it with you, as you not to claim it from him. And that heir, Annie, who plunders you, that stranger to your blood, destined to the enjoyment of your uncle's gold—is John Owen."

Annie looked up surprised and smiling.

"Dear, dear Mr. Owen," she said, "I am glad it is you. I never cared a pin about money."

“Nor ever wanted it, child. And so you are certain of your choice—poverty and love.”

“Dear Mr. Owen, if I would not marry you because we could not love one another, do you think I would marry anyone else for the sake of some money?”

“Flatterer!” he said, smiling.

“Dear Mr. Owen, it is not flattery; it is the truth. God bless you for going to my uncle to-day; I am glad he forgives me on any condition. It has made my heart sore and heavy many a day, to think of his anger against Annie.”

Her eyes filled with tears.

“Well, Annie,” said Mr. Owen, “know your fate. Mr. James Crankey would fain have baffled me; but I made him confess that his affections] were fixed—irrevocably this time—on the lady whom he has the impertinence to call his comforting angel. He acknowledges that his prospects are indifferent, but promises to

attain any eminence, any position she can wish for. Do not trust to that, Annie; I warn you that others, besides young lovers, strive for this world's prizes. What I can do, I will: I will add to Mr. Hanley's thousand pounds the portion I always intended giving you; I will find James Crankey some appointment, and in three weeks, Annie, you shall be his wife."

"So soon!" cried Annie, startled.

"Oh, you may please yourself; but pray, my dear, remember that long courtships are dangerous things. If ours, Annie, had been of three weeks instead of three months, whose wife would you now be?"

"The wife of one who would have been very kind to Annie," she said, softly laying her head on his knee. "God bless you, dear Mr. Owen!"

He smiled, and gently smoothed her silken brown hair; but truly, and from his heart, was Mr. Owen glad that Annie Hanley was not his wife.

All who have read it, say it : there is nothing so sweet as the first page of love's story. But the love-idyl, so sweet for young lovers to read—the tale to them ever fresh and new—can sadly weary other readers. A strange bore to Mr. John Owen were the loves of Annie Hanley and James Crankey. His nature was all passion ; theirs was all fondness ; they could coo the whole day long like young turtles, or chirrup together like birds in a cage, and to a calmer temper and an older man, all this innocent wooing might have been very charming ; to Mr. Owen it gave much annoyance and ennui. At length, to his infinite satisfaction, they were fairly married.

He had procured James Crankey a foreign appointment. Annie's honeymoon was to be spent under new skies, in a strange land. She did not mind ; he was glad : Annie could not be too far away from Mr. Owen. The wedding breakfast was over ; the carriage was waiting

below ; James Crankey looked all love and impatience, and his young bride all lingering and delay. One thing was forgotten, then the next ; at length the plain truth came out.

“ Dear Mr. Owen,” said Annie, “ I want to speak five minutes alone to you before I go.”

James Crankey reddened ; jealousy was in his blood, yet he could not object.

Mr. Owen stepped into the neighbouring room, and Annie following him in, carefully closed the door. He sat down : Annie went up to his chair, laid her hand on his shoulder, and said in a faltering voice :

“ Dear Mr. Owen, I am so happy ! May God Almighty make you as happy as I am, some day.”

“ Thank you for the wish, Annie,” replied Mr. Owen with a calm smile.

“ Oh ! dear Mr. Owen, that is not all. If I am so happy, it is because your good genius and mine twice stepped in and saved me from much woe, and you too, Mr. Owen.”

"What good genius?" he asked coldly.

Annie gently laid her hand on the spot where she knew well enough that the portrait of Grace rested. Mr. Owen said nothing; he looked displeased. He was a proud man, and could not brook that even a gentle hand should probe his secret wound.

"Oh! dear Mr. Owen," said Annie, "do not be angry with me on my wedding-day; and do not get up yet—it is not all. God is good. I know you will find her—I know you will."

"Peace! child," he interrupted, half angrily.

"No, I will not. I tell you you will find her; and as a proof you will, dear Mr. Owen, in her name, and to reward all your goodness to Annie, I give you this."

She passed her arms around his neck and touched his cheek with her lips.

The blood rushed up to his brow; it was not Annie: it was Grace—Grace found after a search

of years—Grace, warm and living, whom he pressed to his heart with ardent fondness.

“Oh! Mr. Owen, Mr. Owen!” cried Annie, frightened.

The illusion vanished. He pushed her away, and rose red and trembling with anger and shame at this self-betrayal.

“God forgive you, child!” he said, turning away.

Annie wanted to speak: he hastily opened the door of the drawing-room where her husband stood waiting. In a few minutes more Annie was gone; and John Owen was again the undisturbed master of a solitary home.

CHAPTER XIII.



ILLUSIONS are the food of life. The fond prediction of a girl long haunted Mr. Owen; long did he feel Annie's kiss on his cheek; moment of keen joy that cost him hours of misery. But time passed, and wrought its changes, and still he found not Grace.

Annie and her husband remained abroad. They were young, fond, and happy; the wildest desert would have been to them a home. Not long after their marriage, Mr. Hanley died suddenly; the melancholy consequence of a dish of oysters cooked by the accomplished successor of Monsieur Jean-Baptiste. All his property, and he was a wealthy man, went, as he had

promised, to John Owen. "More money!" he thought, with a groan. "More gold I cannot share with her!"

From the few persons mentioned in these pages, whose presence or whose names might have recalled her to him, he was daily more severed. Rashleigh Rashleigh and his mother, who had never recovered the affair of Phœbe, left England, and settled in France. Mrs. Chesterfield became a faded beauty, and vegetated in the *oubli* of a watering-place as old-fashioned as herself. Lily, now Lady Stuart, might have succeeded her, but that Lord Stuart, who had a poor opinion of women, and especially of his own wife—he both loved and despised her—chose to keep her captive in the Highlands, whence she never emerged, and where no one, it was said, ever saw her. And as it was with these, so it was with all, until that Past which was John Owen's true life, was enclosed in a silence and oblivion deep as were ever those of fabled Lethe.

And thus seven years in all, seven years since he had voluntarily forsaken Grace, had passed away, and Mr. Owen's hair, once so black, was now iron-gray ; and there were wrinkles on his brow, and on his sallow face lines traced by the light and invisible hand of Time—the hand that effaces none of its tokens.

He was stepping into his carriage one morning, when a decently-clad woman came up to him, and said, very earnestly :

“Sir, I beg your pardon, but are you not Mr. Owen—Mr. John Owen ?”

“I am,” he replied, looking at her fixedly. She had a strong Welsh accent, and he vaguely remembered her face.

She sighed and smiled.

“I dare say you recollect me, sir,” she said ; “I remember you quite well, in Wales, years ago ; but I should never have dared to come to you, sir, if I had not been told to give you this.”

She put a slip of paper in his hand. He looked at it carelessly, and read :

“If you can oblige our poor countrywoman, do so, for the sake of GRACE LEE.”

An electric shock seemed to pass through his frame, fire flowed in his veins, passionate and tumultuous joy filled his whole being. “Found ! found !” his heart cried to his heart : “Found at last !” But he controlled himself.

“Come in,” he said to the woman. She followed him within the house ; he opened a door ; she entered ; he closed it ; then he said :

“Who gave you this paper ?”

“Miss Lee, sir.”

“With her own hand ?”

“Ay, sir, indeed she did.”

“And she told you to bring it to me ?”

“Yes, sir, she did. ‘Take that to Mr. Owen,’ she said, ‘and give it to him from me. If he can help you, I know he will, for your sake and for mine.’ Those were Miss Lee’s own words, sir.”

He sat down ; his head swam ; a joy too deep made his heart beat and throb with dangerous force.

“How is she ? ” he said. “Where is she ? ”

The woman looked at him and hesitated.

“I suppose you have been forbidden to tell me,” he resumed, smiling at the vain precaution, “but surely you were not forbidden to let me know if Miss Lee was well.”

Still she did not reply.

“Well ? ” he said, impatiently.

“Sir,” she answered, “I must tell you the whole truth. How or where Miss Lee is—ill or well—living or dead—I know not. When she gave me this paper, and I last saw her, she lived in an old house by the Prince’s Road ; it is now seven years ago.”

When the cup seemed most full, it was dashed from his lips ; when all seemed light, all vanished in utter gloom. He was used to it, yet of all his disappointments none had ever seemed so keen

and so tormenting as this; like a cold steel it entered his very heart: he rose and turned away, flushed with the pain.

“Then I suppose, sir,” timidly said the woman, “you can do nothing for me?”

Mr. Owen drew forth his purse.

“Oh, dear, sir,” she exclaimed, reddening, “that is not what I mean; but I have a boy of fourteen, and if you could——”

“Bring him to me to-morrow, at three,” interrupted Mr. Owen. “Stop, though, what is your name—and why, oh! woman, why did you not bring this before?”

“My name, sir, is Jackson. I am a widow. I knew Miss Lee in Wales, and met her in London. I was very poor; she gave me what relieved my misery, and this letter for you, sir, to give to you if I should fall into want again. I did not, for God was with me.”

“And against me!” he exclaimed, with involuntary bitterness.

"God is against no one, sir," said the widow.

But he made an impatient gesture. She dropped him a curtsey, and withdrew. She was gone, and again he was alone; alone with those two lines written by Grace seven years before: far echo of her lost voice, coming forth from the depths of the Past to haunt him in the Present. He had to speak in the House that night; he spoke well as usual, but very bitterly. 'Tis an old story, that men vent in private life the bitterness of the wounds received in public contests; but who tells, and who knows, from what secret sting, from what hidden woe of their daily life, often spring the sarcasm and the sneer that add deeper rancour to political quarrels, and pour new venom into party hate.

At three the next day Widow Jackson came with her son, an intelligent-looking lad. Mr. Owen promised to do his best for him, and in less than three weeks he had found such a post as might he thought suit his *protégé*. He could

have sent the widow word, he preferred going himself with the tidings. It was sweet though tormenting to hear again a name none ever uttered in his ear. In this mood he sought the widow's dwelling.

She lived about five hundred yards away from his abode, in one of a cluster of cottages that had gathered within the shelter of a few old trees ; ragged children played near a dark pool of water ; over all slept the stillness of declining day. On her threshold, Mr. Owen found Widow Jackson with her son. Both were overpowered with the honour of this visit, and still more with the news he gave them ; in vain he tried to put them at their ease, to make the widow talk. She could only drop curtseys and utter blessings. Impatiently he turned away.

His heart felt sad and weary. He was a man hard to himself as well as to others ; moments of passion might conquer him, but they were only moments scarcely felt, when

they were gone and fled, vanquished. But for once he yielded; for once he indulged in the mood of sorrow and discontent. With folded arms and downcast eyes, he walked slowly along a solitary path; he thought of her who was seldom away from his thoughts, but something warm and living seemed gone from her presence. She no longer walked by his side, vivid, yet absent, the bliss and the torment of his life. She stood in the back ground, pale, shadowy, and dim as a vision; in vain he endeavoured to call her back; she receded more and more, and at last utterly vanished. Mr. Owen was too imaginative not to have in his nature a strong touch of superstition. The thought he had so long repelled came and prevailed in that hour.

“Grace is dead,” he thought, stopping short. “Grace is dead, ay, I feel and I know it; the grave has closed on her. Where?—how?—I know not; I shall never know. Unconsciously I may tread on the earth that hides all I have

vainly coveted to possess. Oh! that with me, too, it were over, that this unquiet fever of life were still, and I sleeping somewhere by her side, a deep, a long slumber. Happy! thrice happy are ye, ye dead!"

And for the first time for years, ambition, that master-passion of his life folded her wings, and wearied of her long flight, pined for repose.

But brief was the rest of that ardent heart. Strong in his will, he recalled Grace; he bade her return, not pale but vivid as the light of day, not dead but overflowing with the fulness of life. He looked at the setting sun; the broad round orb slowly sank down to a yellow horizon, encircling the dark earth like a golden zone, then melting in the hollow air into vast depths of palest blue. But below all was splendour, all was light and flame; a wooded slope was a still forest of bronze and gold, a tame field a purple sea; the dust-worn way a path

of light leading to a burning world. In that fervid glow he sought the loved and lost image he had ever known, all warmth and all light, and again with passionate longing, there rose an inward cry from the depths of his heart, an unuttered voice that said: "Come back, Grace, come back!"

Suddenly he breathed deep. Dream or truth, he saw and heard her. He saw an isolated dwelling, a poor home, rising bare and lone by the road side, an open door, a narrow room, with boarded floor, with white-washed walls, with gilt-edged books on a low shelf, with bright crimson and yellow flowers in the window, with the rich sunlight streaming in; and half lost in the evening gloom, an old man who sat gray and blind in a deep arm-chair, whilst in the bright red light a woman leaning back on a low seat with a heavy book on her knees, read in a clear, musical voice, in a foreign tongue, a tongue long dead and unspoken, a strain of full and ancient verse.

“How fine that Homer is!” said the slow admiring voice of Doctor Crankey.

The blood rushed to John Owen's heart with a force that might have proved fatal to a man less strong. Like a vision come to him at his bidding from the depths of the west, he saw her through the flood of living gold that flowed behind and around her. She sat turned towards him; she looked her years, but unaltered, save in time was her aspect. Her hair was as dark and as abundant as in youth, her eyes were as brilliant, her figure was as full and as graceful, her voice was as sweet, her tongue, too, was as ready.

“Oh! Homer, old Homer!” she said, suddenly pausing; “I like you certainly, but why do Agamemnon and Achilles make such long speeches. Surely ——”

A shadow fell on the floor. She looked, saw him, and sprang to her feet with a joyful cry.

What passed in that first moment, neither

could have told, for neither knew. She had sunk back on her chair, and he was at her feet. His arms clasped her trembling, hers thrown around his neck drew and pressed to her bosom his throbbing brow. He looked up flushed and burning. She bent down red as fire. One feeling like a chain wrapped and bound them both in that ardent embrace. Alas! some might have smiled to see so impassioned a meeting between a man whose hair was gray and a woman who was not young, but none were by, none save a blind old man who with his two hands resting on his chair, vainly turned towards them his troubled face and sightless eyes.

“I knew you would come,” she said at length, looking and laughing down at him with proud yet fond triumph. “I knew you would!”

He neither looked at nor spoke to her. Her arms were still around him; his head had silently sunk on her lap. He thought of, he

knew nothing save that the desire, the thirst of his life, was sated in that moment.

Doctor Crankey sat very still, silently wondering at all he guessed, and could not see.

“Is that Mr. Owen?” he asked at length.

Grace was slowly passing her light hand through the thick gray locks she had once known so dark. At the question a thrill ran through her frame—a thrill of secret joy.

“It is Mr. Owen,” she said aloud, and smiling to herself, she murmured in a voice none could hear: “I knew he would come; I knew he would!”

“Humph!” half growled Doctor Crankey; “Mr. Owen has been a long time coming.” His mind had recovered all its vigour, his temper, too, all its sharpness.

“But he is come,” quickly replied Grace, “I knew he would—I knew he would!”

She repeated the words like the burthen of a glad triumphant song her full heart could not

keep in. He raised his head from her knees, and threw it back to meet eagerly her look fondly bending towards him. The sun had set, and evening filled the room; but he saw her face as light and clear in its gloom, as a bright image looking forth from a sombre mirror. She laid her two hands on his shoulder, and smiled: neither could weary of that long gaze, very sweet after the bitterness of seven years.

At length dusk grew deeper and darker. Grace rose; he sat down by a low table, he leaned his elbow upon it and resting his cheek on his hand, he followed her motions with a curious eye, and gave to every one a rapid comment. He saw her light the lamp: "They keep no servant." Then he looked around that poor room, and he smiled to think that in a few days he should see Grace command, once more mistress of a luxurious home. She had put down the lamp on the mantel-shelf, but its clear, bright light played on her face and figure; her dress was simple to

plainness, yet she wore delicate white sleeves, and in her glossy dark hair two bright gold pins—buttercups with hearts of pearl: “She has not lost her taste for dress,” he thought, and his rapid fancy once more saw her appear adorned and splendid in that gay world she had ruled so long. “They have scorned poor Grace Lee, but let them slight the wife of John Owen if they dare.”

Grace was folding carefully some white work, then she put it away in a deep basket.

“Ay, fold it, Grace, and put it by: others shall work for you now. Your last task is done.”

And the more he found her sunk into lowly poverty, the more he rejoiced that he could again raise her to the heights of a splendid fortune.

Of her own accord Grace, when she had done, came and sat by him; he did not speak nor did she.

"Anything new in the world of letters?" asked Doctor Crankey, who thought this long silence dull.

Neither replied; neither had heard. Far beyond sense or sound, they had passed into the world of their own hearts—that enchanted realm where none save the loved presence can enter—where none save the loved voice can be heard. Doctor Crankey sighed, rose, and quietly groped out of the room.

As he closed the door Mr. Owen, roused by the sound, looked up; he saw that he was alone with Grace, and now he remembered,—he had forgotten all about it, for true joy remembers, knows nothing beyond its own gladness,—for how long a time he had lost her, for how many weary years they had been parted.

"Grace," he said, "where have you been all this time?"

"Here, waiting," she replied, with a smile; "I knew you would come!"

Here ! she whom he had sought for so far, had all the time been breathing the same air. He had daily met hundreds he cared not for, and he had never once seen the face his eyes vainly pined to behold. A keen pang shot through all his joy.

"Here !" he said, "here, and these seven years have I been seeking you."

"Say 'twas seven days : do as I do, laugh at time."

She leaned back in her chair and smiled, happy and triumphant. Time had not changed her, nor cooled his impatient blood.

"Grace," he said, in his old way, half beseeching, half imperious. "Grace, when will you be my wife ? "

"To-morrow if you like, or in another seven years. I do not care."

"You do not care, Grace ?"

"No, John, I do not. Love is immortal ; yet love knows youth and age. When love is young

love knows no bliss beyond union and human happiness, because love is weak. When love has lived and suffered, love grows strong and can bear solitude."

"Then I had better be off," said Mr. Owen, very much piqued.

"Do, if you dare," she replied, with a secure smile: "do if you dare."

She laid her hand on his shoulder, and looking into his face she said, half in earnest and half in jest: "Seven years ago I settled here in this house, and there were two with me—Hope and Disappointment. Every morning Hope said, 'He may come to-day.' But the day passed and you came not, and with night Disappointment told me, 'You see he did not come.' But as dawn follows night, so Hope returned every morning; and thus I lived between these two: suffering and not mourning—happy, though my heart bled daily. I did not know you were seeking me, but I knew you were trying to forget me."

"So you heard of me, Grace," he interrupted.

"What did you hear?"

"I heard that you loved other women. I knew it was false; I knew you always loved me;—aye, and could love none but me;" she added with a smile, sorrowful in its triumph.

"You knew it," he again interrupted, "and yet, Grace, you gave me not a word—not a sign."

"Not one," she replied, smiling. "John, I have always been a proud — a very proud woman."

"But I was seeking you."

"Seeking, yet also trying to forget me; and that was why, John, there was a film on your eyes, a shadow on your heart, and you could not find me."

"Grace," he exclaimed, a little passionately; "hear me; I will tell you all—then judge me."

He took both her hands within his own, he told her a long story—the story of his life since

they had parted : its worst and weakest traits ; for there was this much good in that man, that he scorned—aye, scorned from the depths of his heart, to seem, even to her, better than he was. All, even to every unworthy attempt he had made to forget her, he confessed to her in that hour ; then, with his eyes full on hers, he waited for her sentence.

Ah ! she should never have loved him ; his very love, though passionate and mighty, was like himself, full of faults, full of errors ; for truly had he said it : our heart is the mirror of our being. And if she did love him, with a love that had survived attempted fraud, desertion, and time, all that can wound a woman's heart and pierce her pride, it was because having once blended her very being with his, she could never again take it back ; it was because she could not cease to be the nobler part of his nature ; the breath of his life, and the heart of his heart.

Silently she had heard him, silently she returned his fixed look.

“Speak, Grace,” he said at length; reproach, condemn, I deserve it all.”

His voice was low, and for once he bent his haughty face, pained and humbled. Her dark eyes filled with tears; she stooped, and the pure lips of a pure woman pressed on his brow, seemed to wish to efface away all of care and sin that might have gathered there.

He did not return that embrace, but his head sank on her shoulder. The sea-worn mariner that has found land, the traveller that rests after the burning desert crossed, never knew so deep a sense of freshness and repose as this wearied man of the world in that moment. Ah, love! there is something in thee beyond the light fondness of youthful lovers! Thy spring is all hope, thy summer is all life, but deeper in its ardour, more beautiful in its mingled passion and strength, is thine autumn.

Within a few days they were married. He took her and Dr. Crankey to Eden. She looked around her; she saw that, though invisible and absent, she had presided over that spot; and from her heart she said, "May I live and die here!" And with her own will she would never have left that quiet home. Yet to please her husband she had to appear again in the world, and preside over the large circles, which more through pride of her, than for any other motive, he now chose to draw to his house in town; but peaceful Eden was, and still is, her cherished home.

There her life flows calmly; his is unquiet as ever. Proud, ambitious, bitter, scornful, his best perhaps his only redeeming trait is his ardent love for Grace. For him, the burning tale of a first passion never seems to be told. Weak and imperfect natures are quickly exhausted; their sins, their loves, and their passions are strong but in youth. Once this first fervent season

passed, they die or linger away ; but though full and complete natures are rare, they exist ; in evil they are dangerous, in good heroic, in either unwearied and unconquered. Pride was Mr. Owen's greatest sin ; his best, perhaps his only virtue,—if virtue it could be called,—that he could love long and ardently a noble woman.

If Grace wished for quiet, domestic happiness, her wish was not granted. Her husband loved her as passionately after as before marriage. She yielded to this stormy bliss, but looked for the day that should calm it down to silence and repose. She knew that there are pauses of rest in the sweetest music ; that when the human heart overflows, its bed long remains barren and dry. She watched for the ebbing of the tide. It never ebbed for her. Years have passed over her head, children have grown up around her ; and her lover, unsated by possession, unwearied by habit, has never sunk down into the mere husband.

Grace is silent, but she often marvels in her

heart at this great love of John Owen for her. She knows not that poverty and ambition had saved him from much sin ; but that with prosperity he might, like many a better man, have grown cynical and profligate ; that Providence has sent him this heavenly guest to guard him from temptation, to absorb in a generous passion other passions less noble, to atone for many a dark sin of anger and pride, and lead him to the judgment-seat a man not unblemished, but redeemed and forgiven.

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